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LIFE-STORIES OF FAMOUS MEN

ROBERT OWEN

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ROBERT OWEN

LIFE-STORIES OF FAMOUS MEN

# ROBERT OWEN

BY

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## PREFACE

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WHEN Robert Owen brought his long and beneficent career to a close in 1858, one who set out to write his biography said to the public that Owen's good works had been interred even before his bones. Never was there a more short-sighted view of a great man's career. There were aspects of English life in those days which might have been proudly claimed as the monument of this or that reformer. One would have claimed the political improvement as a monument to Paine or Cobbett. Another might say that the slightly increased comfort of the lives of the workers was a living monument of Cobden. The greater freedom of culture might be counted to the merit of Hume or Gibbon, the freedom of discussion to Carlyle. The lighter load of the children of England might be called the monument of Shaftesbury, the somewhat saner penal system the monument of Howard and Elizabeth Fry, the triumph of Trade Unionism the monument of Francis Place.

But there was one man, and one man only, who had spent fifty years of his life in promoting all these reforms. There was one man who, holding before the mind of England a most comprehensive national reform, had used his life and spent his fortune in furthering every social crusade of his time. This was Robert Owen. It was true that the form in which he conceived his reform

was impracticable. It was at once too vast and too little. It was too vast to be realized in its entirety, and too little to help when, here and there, it was embodied in an isolated social experiment. But it was the kingdom of Robert Owen's idealism which was divided among the more practical reformers of a later age. It was Owen's spirit that stirred in thousands of those who wrought for the betterment of England. Let the men, women, and children of our happier time know and cherish his memory, and complete his work.

J. M.

# I

## THE BOY MAKES THE MAN

SOME day a fascinating work may be written showing how a large part of the fate of whole generations has been settled by a little material accident. Every one knows how a cannon-ball at Pampeluna shattered the leg of a fiery Spanish soldier, Ignatius of Loyola, and converted him into the founder of the Jesuit Society. History tells how, by a like accident to a limb, a French noble, Talleyrand, was turned from the career of arms, and became one of the most astute diplomatists of Europe. We know how much the digestion of the sage of Chelsea had to do with his sulphurous and most useful outpour of ink upon his fellows, and how a little kink in the brain of Friedrich Nietzsche gave the world the idea of the Superman. Perhaps history has turned more on these material trifles than we have been accustomed to think.

Robert Owen, who was the great pioneer of this view, that you must look for the key to character in its surroundings, used to say that one of these little accidents in childhood had had a considerable share in making him the power he became in the life of England. He was a very enthusiastic school boy, keen on being early and doing well, and he one morning swallowed his "flummery" so hot that it injured his stomach for life. This, he says, caused him to choose his food prudently, and eat it deliberately, ever afterwards. It led him, in other words, to cultivate prudence, caution, self-control, and all his other virtues.

Although his general principle is quite sound, he perhaps exaggerates the application at this point. When we find him, years afterwards, as a busy young bachelor, telling his housekeeper to make him an apple-dumpling every day, we question either his prudence or the debility of his stomach. In any case, why should indigestion make Carlyle a spluttering prophet of sacred rage, and Robert Owen a gentle apostle of sweet reasonableness? There were other influences at work in each case, and we will patiently trace them. Owen's principle was, as I said, sound. To understand men you must keep a careful eye on their surroundings. It has been the fashion of late years to smile at Owen's simplicity, and say that we have discovered that a man's heritage, not his environment, is the great force that has shaped him. But all our ingenious theories of heredity are still in the air, and you do well to take account of the external influences that played on a growing character; the world on which the child's eyes first looked, the schooling he had, the changes in his age, and so on. It may be charitable to visit the virtues of the son upon his parents unto the third and fourth generation, but it does not help us much.

Robert Owen saw the light in a very small Welsh town, or over-large village, called Newtown, in Montgomeryshire, on the fourteenth of May, 1771. It does not matter for the moment that the eighth decade of the eighteenth century was a time of great and momentous changes. Very few people in Montgomeryshire knew the spirit that was struggling to birth in the American colonies and in France. Hardly any knew, we may be sure, that James Watt\* was resolutely working out his steam-engine, or that there had been a "revolution" in agriculture, or that the world was passing into a "capitalist age," or that John Wilkes of London had just fired the first shots of a political emancipation. The

Welsh folk tended their cows in the meadows by the Severn, and lived and loved and died in a very ignorant and tranquil world.

Little Robert Owen proved at once to be somewhat different from the others. His father was a comfortable small tradesman, a saddler who added to his business in the main street by being also postmaster. His mother, a farmer's daughter, had her hands full with the care of her thirteen children and her own immortal soul, which she took very seriously, as the Welsh do. For the satisfaction of those who are determined to trace everything to heredity, I can say only that the parents were *very* religious—so was the whole town—and perhaps that explains why Robert rejected the creeds before he began to shave. But they were fairly comfortable folk, in spite of the thirteen little mouths, and Robert got some schooling; which only one British child in seventy got in those days.

Robert was very pious—in fact, ostentatiously pious, for an elder brother used to cuff him often for kneeling by the bed-side to say his prayers at night. He was also very hungry for books. In such schools as there were in those days nothing was taught except the “three R.s,” because that was all the teacher knew (until Robert Owen became an educationist), and more than that was not good for the children of workers. But Robert Owen very early developed the eccentric idea that, if they taught him how to read, he was supposed to read; and he read every book that he could lay his hands on. Before he was ten he had devoured, among other books, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Rollin's *Ancient History*. They made a teacher, or “usher,” of him at about the age of seven, so he lingered at school. He begged books from all who had such luxuries.

As long as this eccentricity was combined with piety it made the slender, pale, dark-haired boy a general favourite. He wrote sermons, which were handed about by the proud parents, and he was known as "the little parson." Many decades later he wrote in his Autobiography that already, before he was ten, the number and mutual bitterness of the sects made him sceptical. Perhaps he is dating his virtues too far back, but he was a very thoughtful boy. In his ninth year he was put behind the counter in a grocer and haberdasher's shop, to earn his living. Already he had had an exceptional length of schooling for those days. This turned his thoughts toward the distant glories and gloom of London, and at the age of ten he was allowed to go and join an elder brother, a saddler, there.

Half the town turned out to wish the little parson "God speed," and give him trifles for remembrance, and applaud his courage in making the mighty journey—by canal boat and lumbering coach—to London alone. But he was only six weeks in London. A handsome offer came to him from one James McGuffogg, a haberdasher, of Stamford. For the first of three years' service he should have only his board and lodging. In the second year he should have eight, and in the third year ten, pounds. Robert braved the coach again, and was installed at Stamford, selling fine and honest fabrics for the worthy Scot.

Here, fortunately, his education proceeded. McGuffogg had a library, and when the shop closed at four Robert sat among the books for five hours of the evening. One of the books, strangely enough, was a translation of Seneca, the Stoic moralist. Robert copied out the fine, austere sentences; and in the spring and summer, when he lay in the park just outside the town, he chewed the cud of his browsing. Seneca probably did more for him

than the scalding flummery. For a time Robert remained pious. Perhaps he heard that—so some then said—Seneca had borrowed his fine sentiments from the New Testament. At any rate, he was still a good Welsh Calvinist at the mature age of thirteen, and, noticing that Stamford folk kept the Sabbath laxly, he wrote a letter to William Pitt, the Premier, asking for stricter legislation. More amusing still is it to learn that McGuffogg read out of his *Times* shortly afterwards an announcement that the Government were taking measures to secure the better observance of the Sabbath, and the repute of his solemn boy-assistant went higher than ever. He could influence Pitt!

But Robert's piety was being undermined. Mrs. McGuffogg was "Church," and she took Robert on Sunday evenings with her, to hear about the sins of Dissenters. Mr. McGuffogg, however, was a Presbyterian, and he had taken Robert in the mornings to the Scottish Kirk, where he would learn the sins of Episcopatism. We cannot doubt Owen's word at this point that he began to study religion seriously, and the more widely he studied it the less he liked it. He concluded that "one and all had emanated from the same source, and their varieties from the same false imaginations of our early ancestors," as he says in his Autobiography. Pondering over this in the glades of Burligh Park, he came to a larger conclusion. Our opinions are made *for* us, not *by* us. Nay, when you think of it, all our qualities, our character, are made for us. "Nature gave the qualities and Society directed them," he says. So, he adds, "my religious feelings were immediately replaced by the spirit of universal charity—not for a sect or a party, or for a country or a creed, but for the human race, and with a real and ardent desire to do them good."



Podmore inquires whether Godwin, the democratic writer, had any influence in the forming of Owen's famous creed. Godwin's *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* was not published until nine years after this date, or in 1793, and we cannot doubt the substance of Owen's recollections, that he reached his principle in 1784. Probably Seneca and the Stoic "charity of the human race" had much to do with it. They never had a younger convert, for Owen was then only thirteen years old; and one may question if they had ever made a more momentous convert since the death of Rome.

In 1785 Owen left Stamford. Apparently the large life of London drew his new sentiments. After a visit to his parents he settled as assistant in a haberdasher's shop on old London Bridge. Most people will have seen pictures of the lines of quaint old over-hanging shops which then backed over the waters of the river. In one of these, a very busy and fashionable store, Owen spent his sixteenth year. He had to be powdered and pomatumed of a morning to meet the eyes of the merchants' daughters from the city, and he had long hours of work. He says that he enjoyed it, but one sees that he had no time for anything except learning business-habits. Not a single reflection on the life of London occurs in his reminiscences. He soon left it. From Manchester came an offer of £10 a year, with easy hours, and in 1787 he went north.

Owen had at last entered the industrial world, the world of cotton, in which he was now to forge his high qualities both for business and humanitarian work. His greatest disciple, George Jacob Holyoake, has described London, with some gratitude, as "the lapidary that polishes the stone sent up from the provinces." Manchester can do its share of that work. To London, in his earlier years, Owen owed nothing. He was, on old

London Bridge, a powdered and pomatumed hermit; a slave of the counter. From 1787 to 1789 he continued his employment, at Satterfield's in Manchester; but he had more leisure to study and look below the surface of life. Manchester had been little more than a large village fifty years earlier, but it was growing rapidly. Watt had now perfected his steam-engine. Hargreaves had invented the spinning jenny, Arkwright the frame, and Crompton the "mule"; and from the countryside, where the old hand labour was being ruined, families drifted in to form the grim and grimy Cottonopolis of the early nineteenth century.

The studious youth, now in his eighteenth year, listened eagerly to a compatriot named Jones, who described the new enterprise to him. Jones proposed that they should set up a works, and Owen, always coldly and steadily audacious, borrowed a hundred pounds from his brother. They employed forty men, and did well. Next year Jones found a richer partner and bought out Robert. Owen was only nineteen, but he set up, in Ancoats Lane, a small spinning mill of his own, and cleared six pounds a week. Presently he heard that the owner of a larger factory, with five hundred hands, wanted a manager. He startled the man by asking for the place and demanding £300 a year. There was something about the youth which prevented the owner from dismissing the application at once, and he put the usual questions. "How many times a week do you get drunk?" he asked Owen. "Never been drunk in my life," said Owen indignantly. Here was either a paragon or a very bold youth. He got the position.

He certainly was a rare young man. For some weeks he quietly supervised, never meddling or giving orders. He was mastering every wheel of the machinery and every detail of the business. Then he began, and the

mill soon had the repute of turning out the finest yarn in that district. The owner, Drinkwater—an ironic name in those days—took him into partnership, with £400 a year the second year, and the promise of £500 in the third. But soon afterwards his “spirit of universal charity” had a new opportunity of exercising itself. An intriguer wanted his place as partner, and Drinkwater asked Owen to sell out, but remain as manager at almost any salary. Robert tore up the agreement and flung it in the fire. The shade of Seneca seems to have haunted him for this touch of temper, and he is very penitent in his Autobiography. In point of fact, hardly one man in a thousand would have declined, as Owen did, to make a few hundred pounds out of the affair; and, even more to his credit, when he passed to a new mill he scrupulously refused to make the same fine yarn by which he had made the prosperity of Drinkwater. He became managing director of the Charlton Twist Company, and set up a quite handsome bachelor establishment.

But Manchester did something for Owen, and for his fellows, much more important than teaching him business habits. At first he had lodged with Robert Fulton, who would one day be famous as the pioneer of steam navigation. Owen listened for hours to the teeming ideas of the inventor, and lent him large sums of money. He made another friend of the name of John Dalton—a name that would one day shine in one of the main streets of Manchester and would be known to chemists all the world over. Dalton was assistant chemist at the Unitarian College, and in one of the rooms of the college he and Owen and Winstanley used to have great discussions of an evening. Dalton talked of atoms, the bases of the universe. They went on to politics—for the French Revolution was in full blast—and religion and literature. Dalton was a very liberal Quaker, and the

talk became too warm for a Unitarian College and had to be continued elsewhere. The poet Coleridge, who was staying in Manchester, joined them for a time. He was then still a democrat, a passionate and poetic talker, and his shining phrases were often pricked by Owen's needle. They called Owen "the reasoning machine."

From this little circle he went on to the Literary and Philosophical Society, where at first he listened in silent admiration to all the wit and learning of Manchester. The President and founder, Dr. T. Percival, was one of the leading physicians, a Fellow of the Royal Society. Henry, the eminent chemist, also belonged to the Royal Society. Dr. Ferriar and other able men attended. The atmosphere was one of learning and extreme liberalism on all questions. The topics of debate ranged over the whole field of culture. Owen was at last drawn into debate, blushing and stammering in the presence of scholars and veterans. Mr. Podmore finds that he afterwards read four papers to the Society—a high compliment to him, for he was not thirty when he left Manchester.

I may say at once that I do not altogether like my friend Mr. Podmore's biography of Owen. It is very learned and able, but it is not an adequate appreciation of the greatness of Robert Owen, and it concedes too much to Owen's bitter clerical enemies. Podmore says that Owen was not at all a man for books. That is only true after a certain age. In his boyhood he devoured books, and at Manchester he must have read much to keep up to the level of the Literary and Philosophical Society. He had now a rounded philosophy of life. He was a Deist, but a strong humanitarian. He saw a mighty power, science, entering the service of man; yet he saw also that towns like Manchester were multiplying slums

which reeked with vice and crime. His mind lit by his great principle, that the vicious and criminal are made by their environment, he saw that it was the duty of wise men to attack these, not to preach sermons. The next move in his precocious career now gives him a splendid opportunity of doing this.

## II

### OWEN CREATES A NEW WORLD

IN the service of his new business Owen had to travel over the north of England and Scotland. We need not say how this enlarged his knowledge of the degraded and pathetic condition of the workers, which we will presently consider. For the moment what concerns us is that it lit the inevitable fire of romance in the breast of "the reasoning machine." A young lady of Manchester gave him an introduction to a Miss Caroline Dale, of Glasgow. She was the daughter of a fairly wealthy spinner, as wealth went then; and, what was more intimidating, her father was a religious zealot, a lay preacher, a man who thought "infidels" brands for the burning. But Robert Owen fell in love, and he approached the new task of conciliating the pious Mr. Dale as coolly as he had written to Pitt and accosted Drinkwater.

It illustrates his character. He heard that the New Lanark mills, up the Clyde, which Dale owned, were to be sold. He calmly visited Mr. Dale and proposed to buy his mills. Dale was as astonished as most people were who first met Robert Owen, but in a little while he sold the mills to Owen and his Lancashire partners for £60,000; and in another little while he agreed to give the hand of his daughter to the "heretic." At first, when Caroline had blushing exposed her heart, he had said that he would have no "landlouser" in *his* family. He was a just man, however, and was compelled to recognize Owen's singularly high character and ability; and one

reads between the lines that Owen's virtues were much assisted by Caroline's tears. They were married, Scottish fashion, in the father's house on September 30, 1799, and the couple set off for Manchester. By good fortune, the manager of the New Lanark Mills proved so incompetent that the partners asked Owen to return there, and on the first day of the new year he inaugurated the most brilliant and famous social experiment of the time.

Stand with Owen for a moment at the door of his house, and try to realize the task he took upon himself a hundred and twenty years ago. There were the large mills, employing between two and three thousand typical cotton workers of the time. Men, women, and children worked in the foul, insanitary, badly-lit rooms from six in the morning until seven in the evening, Saturdays included. Parents brought their children along from their seventh year. Five hundred orphans, from various workhouses, were there under the despotic authority of the manager. The others had come mainly from the slums of Glasgow and Edinburgh. The mills were thirty miles from Glasgow, in the green and pleasant vale of the Clyde, because they drew their power from the river-falls. But country folk generally hated them, and kept to their healthier work. Deep poverty drove workers to them from the cities; and workhouse authorities gladly—to get rid of them—sent a cartload of orphans, aged six and seven, now and again. The general character may be deduced. Their homes were foul. Their habits were primitive. Their streets were sewers. Their public-houses were infamous. Thieving, lying, swearing, drinking, and fighting were as common as the squalor with which they spattered the golden valley.

We are invited by biographers to recollect that Mr.

Dale was a genuinely religious and just man, and he insisted on religious influence at New Lanark. Certainly the people were religious. The conflicting sects hated each other energetically. But Robert Owen never maligned any man in his life, and he had a great regard for Dale; yet he tells us expressly that the state of the place was as I have described, and Dale, who rarely went there, did not know it. One of the few differences from the ordinary industrial community of those days was that the orphans were well housed and treated humanely. In most places they were housed in the mill, like slaves, and beaten with iron rods. More children's bodies were used up in the mills of the north of England and Scotland from 1780 to 1830 than ever entered the brazen jaws of the awful statue of Moloch at ancient Carthage. At New Lanark the children were treated better, though they were left to the influence of the soaking evil of the place, and they generally slunk off to the slums of the cities when their apprenticeship was over. The place was, in most respects, fouler than the lowest slums are to-day. And Robert Owen, who was convinced that man's character is made for him and not by him, looked charitably on this community, and resolved to apply his principles to it.

The result may first be told in a word. In less than fifteen years New Lanark was known all over Europe. The future Tsar of Russia came to study it. Queen Victoria's father took the deepest interest in it. The King of Prussia obtained reports on it. All the economists and social workers of England came and blessed it. Thousands of distinguished visitors made the long coach journey from London or the north of England. Nothing like it had ever been known. The Welsh magician had passed his wand over the filthy New Lanark of 1800, and in its place was now, literally,



the happiest, healthiest, and most virtuous village of the civilized world. The evidence is unanimous. Owen had in fifteen years created a new world, or a good sample of a new world. That is the key to all his later life. That is the solid fact of his creed.

For the first few years little progress was made. The business had to be developed as a financial basis for reform, because Owen's partners were not philanthropists, and were no more than other manufacturers in favour of reducing hours and releasing children. On the other hand, the workers themselves had no mind to be reformed. They looked darkly on the foreigner who would close their whisky shops and curtail their liberties. Owen laid it down "that all the village shall to the utmost of their power, as far as is consistent with their duty to God and to society, endeavour, both by word and deed, to make every one happy with whom they have any intercourse." They had not been trained in Sunday-schools, and at first this language fell upon profane ears. Were they not happy? Inarticulately they put to Robert Owen the great difficulty which is supposed to confront every utilitarian moralist. If your supreme command is that men shall be happy, on what ground do you interfere with men who are happy in ignorance, drink, dirt, and sensualism? How will you persuade men and women brought up as they had been that sobriety makes a man happier than drunkenness, diligence is better than dirt, reading books more satisfactory than fighting?

Owen gave the answer. First he provided surplus funds by reorganizing the work and substituting new for obsolete machinery. Theft, which was appalling, he suppressed by instituting a checking system which had been entirely neglected. Then he reduced the hours of labour, and let them see that they could earn as much as ever. The higher workers made more than ever. He

then extended his care to the village. Little shops gave them long credit, and charged exorbitant prices to cover losses due to lack of thrift. Owen founded reasonable stores which supplied goods twenty-five per cent. cheaper, yet made in a few years a profit of £700, which he applied to his schools. He had the streets cleaned and sewered, and forbade the casting of refuse before the house. When he then invaded their homes, and insisted on a thorough cleansing once a week and a coat of whitewash once a year, the women added their clatter to the men's curses. He appointed a number of visitors. "Here come the Bug Hunters," the women would cry, as they approached; and most of them retreated within and barred the doors. Owen, patient and smiling ever, but pertinacious as a mole, got his way and transformed the village.

The struggle against drink was more formidable. The details he gives are imperfect, but it seems that he gradually closed the public-houses and ensured a remarkable sobriety for that age. The New Year orgy long defied him, and, though he disliked punishment of any description, he in the end had to stop a day's pay for drunkenness at the New Year. The village was divided into districts. Each district chose a "principal," and these met to appoint a jury of twelve men who had to enforce the rules and examine cases of default; and once a week they reported to Owen himself. We must not, however, imagine that the sobriety he eventually won was merely enforced by "Act of Parliament." It was the gradual triumph of his ideals that mainly transformed the village, for drink could always be obtained at Old Lanark and neighbouring villages. Yet so thorough was the change that Robert Dale Owen, who lived near the mills and village in his father's house, never saw a drunken man until he was twelve years old (1813), and did not then know what was the matter with the man.

This was in an age when London public-houses put up the sign, "Drunk for a Penny, Dead Drunk for Two-pence," and there were few gentlemen of England and Scotland who did not get drunk habitually. Owen, it may be added, was not a teetotaller. He ate and drank sparingly, but he liked his glass of wine and begrudged no worker his glass of ale.

Sexual irregularity was a second stubborn practice that he attacked, if not the most stubborn of all. There is ample evidence that the demoralized—or shall we say unmoralized?—workers of that day had a license which is unknown even in the slums of Glasgow to-day. Girls were often mothers at thirteen and fourteen, and the infant death-rate was appalling. Boys of seven and eight swaggered into inns for pots of ale and swore like guardsmen. Owen compelled fathers of illegitimate children to pay two shillings a week, and saw that the infants had a chance of life. The clergy of the district—there were, of course, none in New Lanark, though Owen never imposed his own views—declared, a few years later, when Owen had drawn their zeal upon him by attacking religion, that his villagers were no better than others in this respect. The lie is easily answered. A deputation was sent from Leeds to study New Lanark thoroughly, and it includes in its report the fact that, though there were 1,380 women there, there had been only twenty-eight illegitimate children in nine and a-half years (1810-19); and the fathers rarely belonged to New Lanark. For that age it was an extraordinary achievement. From London—from the royal palace itself—to Glasgow and Edinburgh sexual license was general.

The main secret of Owen's triumph with the adult population was, no doubt, the proof that sobriety is better, when you try it, than intemperance. The cleaner houses and streets, the better and cheaper food, were

gradually appreciated. People found themselves clad more warmly in the biting Scottish winter. The horrors of sick periods and old age were mitigated. Owen founded a Sick Fund, to which each operative contributed one-sixtieth of his weekly wage. He opened a Savings Bank, and in a single year the once thriftless workers deposited £3,000 in it; though Owen did not pay high wages, as he spent tens of thousands of pounds of the profits on benefits for the community. There were few ideas of modern times that he did not anticipate. He established communal kitchens and dining-rooms, and gave his work-people good, well-cooked food at moderate prices while the wives worked. He gave them a better sanitary service than men had in Glasgow or Edinburgh. For the aged he built a group of attractive communal houses on the fringe of the village, and they contributed a little every week. All the famous social legislation by which the German Government sought to arrest Socialism in the last decades of the nineteenth century was foreshadowed at New Lanark.

It was slow work, but Owen, who combined an amazing boldness with the quietness of a Quaker, did something in 1806 which won the hearts of numbers of the rebels. The American War was on, and the cotton industry was reduced to the most deplorable shifts. Owen closed his mills, and told his workers that he would pay them full wages as long as the embargo on cotton lasted. It was well for him and them that his Lancashire partners were two hundred miles away. The act of generosity cost him £7,000. As soon as the mills had recovered, he reduced the hours of work to fourteen a day, with two hours for meals. In 1816 he reduced them further to twelve per day, with one and a quarter hours for meals. We shall see that this was far from his ultimate ideal.

One of the quaintest parts of his social machinery, one that a modern reformer would find it difficult to adopt, was his "Silent Monitor." The visitor to his mills was astonished, unless he had been previously informed, to see a little coloured block of wood hanging above the position of each worker. They were four-sided blocks, about an inch square and two inches long, and each side was painted a different colour. Glancing over the room, one would see that a few of them were black and a few white, but the greater number were blue or yellow. Had one visited the mills every year during the period of reform, one would have seen a remarkable progression of colours. In the beginning blacks and blues predominated. As time went on, the yellows and whites gained on the darker hues; and in the later stages of Owen's management the signs were almost entirely white, with a sprinkling of yellows.

These curious objects were what one may call "moral thermometers." Each colour told at a glance, to himself and everybody else, the position that the employee near it occupied in the conduct-book. The "blacks" were, literally, the black sheep of the fold. When the man or woman showed a tolerable improvement, the block turned its blue face to the visitor. "Yellow" meant good conduct, and "white" excellent.

There was throughout Owen's life a charming simplicity about his methods. I think the reader will conclude with me, before we have gone much further, that there was hardly another mind in Europe that harboured so many great social ideas, such comprehensive plans of human reform. But with these went a quality which one is tempted to call "childlike," and it moved Owen at times to do such simple and bold things as occur to children, and provoke the smiles of philosophers and statesmen. He held, all his life, that

the "Silent Monitor" had been a powerful moral agency at New Lanark. Many of us will prefer to think, perhaps, that the gradual evolution of his wooden flowers, from the satanic to the angelic hue, was rather a buoy floating on the surface of the rising flood of a better spirit.

But what about the shrewd Lancashire men, two hundred miles away, who had sent Owen, not to carry out the ideas of Seneca, but to increase their dividends? He did, it is true, send them splendid returns on their investment, but it was not an age of philanthropy, and they murmured increasingly as sum after sum was set aside for the fantastic work of making drunken workers sober. When he at last proposed to take £5,000 from the profits for building a handsome school, their language became so plain that Owen decided to buy them out. They could hardly complain when they received, in 1809, £84,000 for the mills they had in 1799 bought for £60,000, and knew that they had shared £60,000 in profits in the ten years.

Scottish partners, whom Owen presumed to be more benevolent, were now brought in, and the work of education proceeded rapidly. Wages were raised. A handsome lecture and recreation hall was built. And in 1811 came the inevitable remonstrance. Capital is capital, not stuff for reformers to play with. Owen resigned, and wrote a pamphlet. He described the work and appealed for partners who could afford to spare a tithe for the workers. The issue of it is another illustration of Owen's mixture of shrewdness and simplicity, and the way in which many people saw only the latter.

Owen disappeared from Scotland. It was known that he had written a book and gone to London to find a publisher. So the "canny Scots" put up the mills for sale, and made a pretty arrangement to buy them in at a

bargain. They had made a profit of £160,000 in four years, but they put it about that Owen had ruined their property and it could not be expected to fetch more than £40,000. The auction was fixed for December 31 (1813), and a handsome dinner was arranged to celebrate their deal. There was a little uneasiness when Robert Owen turned up at the sale room with three strange men; but the bidding proceeded. When it reached £114,000 the partners withdrew, in terror and anger, and Owen secured the mills for £114,100. He had been empowered to rise to £120,000.

In London he had got his ideal partners. William Allen, John Walker, John Fox, and John Foster—all wealthy and philanthropic Quakers—and a certain Michael Gibbs, had entered into secret agreement with him. Jeremy Bentham, the great jurist and humanitarian, came in at a later stage. Owen took five shares out of thirteen, and, concluding his agreement on December 27, travelled post haste over the frozen hills, and defeated the schemers.

A few days later he re-entered New Lanark, to which the news had come. Flags hung from all the houses. The people met him with a band at the outskirts of the village, took out his horses, and dragged his carriage through the smiling streets. Every house put out what illumination it could that night. Owen was back, not only in Braxfield House by the Clyde, but in the hearts of a regenerated and happy and grateful people. He was now empowered to spend all profit, after paying five per cent. on capital, on his beloved children and workers, and soon the hammer and the saw made new music in the valley.

### III

## THE PIONEER OF BRITISH EDUCATION

THE work that I have described in the last chapter was the most difficult part of the task. The education of the adult is even to-day the most scandalously neglected, yet one of the most important, of our national tasks; but it was far more difficult a century ago. Hardly one of the poor workers at New Lanark had had even the miserable rudimentary schooling which was called elementary education in those days. The overwhelming majority of the manufacturers resisted every attempt to educate, not merely because their fortunes were largely built on child-labour, but on the deliberate ground that educated workers would be less docile. The result was much the same all over Britain. Working twelve hours a day from their seventh and eighth years onward, unable to read a line, confined in a narrow and squalid world which offered little pleasure that was not coarse and vicious, the majority of the workers seemed to have lost all power of appreciating beauty and character. We have seen what Owen did with two thousand of these; and their rejoicings, at the end of the last chapter, have shown us that he had come to rule over their hearts as well as their lives.

But his main work was with the children. Every syllable of his creed prompted him to take an affectionate and deep interest in the young. Here was the plastic human material for his idealist moulds. The adult had already taken shape in some perverse mould of circumstance before he reached the hands of Robert Owen.



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His character was hardened by bad habits ; his mind was scored by unhealthy experiences. The child was clay in the hands of the potter. Children are, Owen used to say, the guests of humanity. We must lavish on them all the courtesy and attention we give to the most honoured guest. We can make them what we will. Give me five hundred children, he said, from any families and surroundings you will, and I will make them what *I* will. There shall be no whip—no child was ever beaten in his house or his schools—and no sugar plums. The wax of the child's character shall be gently and affectionately moulded into the shape of a youth or maiden who will be equally happy and socially disposed.

It is not unusual to-day to smile at Owen's belief. How could he be expected, the critic says generously, to anticipate the discoveries of modern science? Who, then, knew the inexorableness of germ-plasm, and "zygotes," and so on? Now we know that the child's character is made for it—before it is born. All the education in the world, says Professor Karl Pearson, will not alter the good and bad elements in the new-born babe. Your educationist, trying to form the character of a child, is "the vilest abortionist," says Mr. G. B. Shaw. "But it moves for all that," muttered Galileo, when he signed the statement that the earth stood still. So Owen took five hundred children, of vicious and criminal parents, and made them a model for the civilized world. The fact is that heredity is still a mystery. All our theories are disputed. But the power of environment—of the school and the serious and wise teacher—is just as real as Owen claimed.

I have called Owen the pioneer, yet am quite aware that there had already been a ferment of educational ideas in England, and that the work of Pestalozzi was widely known. In his Manchester years Owen had

certainly heard much about the ideas of Lancaster, who was well known there. But the theories and practices of Bell and Lancaster were primitive in comparison with the standard which Owen set up at New Lanark. Whether he knew anything at that time about the great Swiss educationists is not clear, and is, I think, improbable. His son tells us that from the time he settled in Scotland he was not a great reader of books. He had the type of mind that neither claims originality nor can see any merit in it. But he was singularly original, and thought out everything for himself. His system of education was probably devised by himself in every detail; and all Europe admitted that it was leagues beyond anything that then existed. Mr. Podmore, who rarely praises, admits that Owen was "far in advance of his contemporaries in these islands."

Of the little fortune of £3,000 which Owen had made in Manchester he gave £1,000 to Lancaster, the undenominational educationist, and £500 to his Church of England rival, Dr. Bell. We do not know at what period this was, but it must have been early in the first decade of the nineteenth century, when England resounded with the fight of "Bel(l) and the dragon," as the wits put it. Owen offered Dr. Bell and his Society a further £500 if they would abandon their sectarian teaching; but they kept his first £500 and sacrificed the second cheque. We may presume that there were not many in those days who gave £1,500 out of a slender capital for the cause of education.

Once, however, that he had obtained the power he needed at New Lanark, Owen confined his attention to his own schools. No child was permitted to enter the mills before the age of ten, and he presently raised the age to twelve, where it stood until a few decades ago; but even to release children of eight and nine was a bold

thing to do in Owen's time. For the infants he provided a large and comfortable play-room. They were not taught to read, but a gentle, kindly man, who could hardly read himself, was put in charge to guide and direct their happy hours. They were to be taught how to be happy and well behaved. Beyond this there was only a mild attempt to stimulate intellectual curiosity about their immediate surroundings. They were taught from objects, pictures, and maps—not books. Dancing was taught to all children over the age of two, and was a great feature throughout the schools.

This was the first infant school in Britain, and would suffice of itself to justify the title of pioneer. The schools of Bell and Lancaster, which were now spreading over England, did not take infants. Perhaps it was as well, for their teachers were "monitors" (older scholars) and would have been almost worse than useless with the delicate minds of infants. Owen refused to use the monitor system, in spite of its cheapness, and he with great care sought men and women who were specially gifted for dealing with the young. The fine folk of London, Lord Brougham and the other Liberal reformers, begged Owen's assistance in reproducing his school at Westminster; and, thoroughly unselfish as he always was, he sent them his priceless infant-master, Buchanan. Of course, they tried to improve on Owen's model, and the result was that their school never attained anything like the success of Owen's. Continental visitors and scholars did not linger at Westminster. They pushed on to New Lanark.

The new school, on which Owen had set his heart, was opened on January 1, 1816. It was a large two-storied building, known as "The Institute for the Formation of Character," for it was used in the evenings for concerts, dances, lectures, and entertainments for the

workers. The name may sound pedantic in a modern ear, but it would be well if it were written over the porch of every school to-day ; if teachers were reminded that what England really wants of them is not so much the communication of the very learned details of history and geography which they acquired at college as, in Ruskin's words, "the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures."

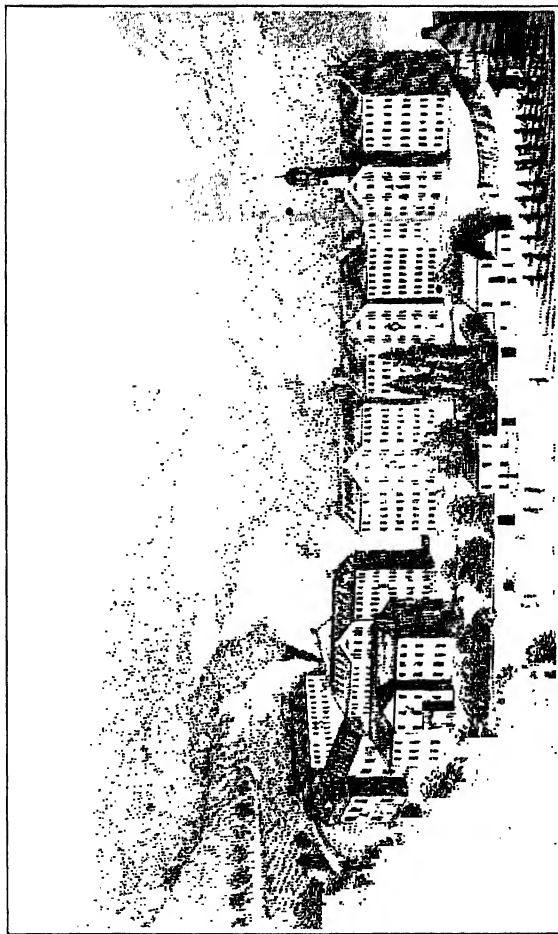
The formation of character was the key-note of the educational work at New Lanark. There were no rewards and no punishments. The vanity of the more gifted child was not encouraged, nor was the child with a poor heritage of brain harried and bullied. The best was patiently and skilfully drawn out in each. Owen knew well how much this depended on physique and interest, and a large place was given to physical exercise. A special dress was designed for them : white cotton tunics, which were changed three times a week, and bare feet. The boys wore their tunics to the knees only, and we shall presently find Owen's partners rolling their pious eyes at the shocking exhibition of bare legs. Song and dance filled many an hour, and drill was much practised ; and a drum and fife band was made of the children themselves.

But, so far from sacrificing to these novelties what is ordinarily called education, Owen and his teachers communicated far more knowledge than was given to children of that age anywhere in the world. He scorned the common sentiment of the time—that to give too much knowledge or mental stimulation to children who are about to become workers is apt to lead to revolution. His industrial system was, he considered, thoroughly just, and the better mind a worker had the more thoroughly he would co-operate in it. He therefore

instructed his teachers that reading, writing, and arithmetic, to which elementary instruction was then confined, were only means to an end, not an end in themselves; and all the culture of the time was given in such measure as was fitted for the child mind.

Books were little used up to the age of ten. Geography was taught from maps and globes, and turned almost into a pastime. History was taught, not in crabbed text-books which bristled with useless dates and unpronounceable names and such trivialities as the births and marriages of kings, but from coloured charts which showed the nations blending and separating like the streams of Lanarkshire. The peoples of the world were described in their surroundings, so that the defects of each could be charitably explained and the feeling of brotherhood encouraged. Something of every branch of science was introduced, and the child was prepared to make use in later life of the good library that was provided. The real and pictorial were throughout used in preference to books. Even the "parts of speech" were represented by dolls. But his children knew botany and the Linnæan system before they were twelve; and it may be added that his little girls knew sewing and domestic economy.

To call Owen's ideas of education "crude" and "belated" is to lose sight entirely of the work of three generations of educationists since his day. In every respect we must judge Owen by the ideas and practices of *his* time, not ours. That is a reasonable rule which his critics almost always forget. When we pay attention to it, we find that he was, in education as in nearly all other matters, head and shoulders above his generation. His whole work was dominated by the broadest and sanest ideal—sound mind, sound body, sound character, and sound taste. We may think that his zeal for the



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picturesque carried him too far in some details, but it had at least the advantage of winning the hearty co-operation of the children. They worshipped "the manager." Whenever he appeared they would crowd round him and pay homage. Yet these youngsters had no idea that over the rest of Scotland and the north of England their brothers and sisters were working twelve and thirteen hours a day, and spending their childhood in a world as drab and cruel as their own was bright and happy.

The result was, as I said, that the fame of New Lanark, which stood very low in pious Scotland, reached the farthest confines of Europe. Between 1814 and 1824 the place had, on the average, two thousand visitors a year, most of whom had come immense distances in the lumbering coaches of that age. In the visitors' book at Braxfield House were the names of nearly all the serious social students of London—Sir Samuel Romilly, Sir J. Bowring, Lord Stowell, Joseph Hume, Lord Brougham, Canning, Cobbett, Wilberforce, Godwin, Richard Carlile, Clarkson, Sir Robert Peel, Malthus, James Mill, Ricardo, Southey, Francis Place, Sir J. Mackintosh, etc. The King of Prussia sent his ambassador, Baron Jacobi, and from the ambassador's report the Prussian schools adopted ideas which were wasted on the British Government. The Austrian ambassador, Prince Esterhazy, joined the procession. One day Owen startled his quiet wife by telling her that the Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia and his suite were coming to stay at Braxfield House for a few days! The future Tsar was so impressed that he wanted to find a place for one of Owen's sons at his court, and he offered to take two millions of the surplus population of the British Isles to be formed into a model province under the command of Robert Owen.



This side of Owen's work is of some importance in connection with his experiences in London afterwards; and I may add that one of the most sincere and influential of Owen's admirers was Queen Victoria's father, the Duke of Kent. It is true that Owen gave the Duke some assistance in disentangling his involved private affairs, but it is quite clear from the Duke's letters (reproduced in Sargant's life of Owen) that he was genuinely interested. We shall see how, in 1819, when Owen had made many enemies by attacking religion, the Duke sent his physician, Dr. Macnab, to New Lanark. Macnab was confessedly prejudiced, but it seems that the Duke foresaw the result. The cautious physician became a lyrical enthusiast after seeing New Lanark. The sight of the schools and the children enraptured him. "The pen of a Milton," he says in his report (in Sargant), "and the pencil of a Rubens could not do justice to such a picture." Lord Brougham, as I said, was inspired by New Lanark to set up the first infant school in London.

I may anticipate a little in telling how Owen's new partners interfered with, and partly inspired, his work. The most important and most active of these was the Quaker, William Allen, a sincere and distinguished philanthropist. It would not be just to call Allen narrow-minded because one happens to differ from him, but he took the strait Quaker ideals very seriously. All educational work must, he said, be founded on God and the Bible. The consequence was that, as soon as Owen began to declare his opinions on religion, Allen began to take a critical and meddlesome interest in the New Lanark schools. From the first he and his brother Quakers had insisted on the teaching of the Catechism and the Bible. Owen was for secular education, and it was plainly through the humanitarian or social ideals

which he urged at every turn that he had achieved his great triumph. But people like Allen steadily regard their theories, and take no notice of facts. There was too much singing and dancing, he concluded; and the children's happiest hours had to be curtailed. These kilts or short tunics, showing the bare legs of boys of eleven to little maids of eleven, were improper and heathen; and there had to be another change. The Bible was not used sufficiently. And so on. We shall see that in the end he worried Owen into abandoning the enterprise. It was a grave mischief, for Owen, after the first failure of his work in a larger theatre, ought to have fallen back upon New Lanark, or managed it through his sons, and from that fortress of accomplished fact conducted his wider crusade.

However that may be, we have now seen the complete application of Owen's great principle to a human community. There is not the least serious difference of opinion about the result. He transformed his human material. He, in the course of fifteen years, created a new world. It is merely pedantic to quarrel with little details, like his dressing up a group of dolls as "General Noun" and "Colonel Verb" and "Corporal Adverb," in order to induce children to take some interest in the sawdust of grammar. The work was a triumph. The only mistake that Owen made was to undervalue the immense influence of his own personality and ascribe everything to his "principle." But the principle had at least proved its soundness after a severe and lengthy trial, so Robert Owen was satisfied. It remained to convince the world of the wonderful and beneficent discovery he had made.

## IV

### A NEW VIEW OF SOCIETY

SIR LESLIE STEPHEN, who wrote the sketch of Robert Owen's life in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, has shocked some admirers of the great reformer by calling him "one of those intolerable bores who are the salt of the earth." I knew Stephen, as kindly and liberal a thinker as ever lived, well, and he had not the least idea of depreciating Owen, as the last words of his description show. But he had an overpowering sense of humour, and Owen's entire lack of humour tried him. In fact, he does a little injustice to Owen, who really charmed every man he came in contact with. But what Stephen chiefly means is that Owen, in season and out of season, drummed one great idea into the ears of his contemporaries: that a man's character is made for him. We have seen why Owen was so persistent and so uncloudedly confident. His theory was unlike any other social theory that yet existed. It was proved.

His first attempt to communicate this to his fellows was not at all successful. After Waterloo and the conclusion of the French War there was the inevitable economic reaction. The clouds of want and unemployment gathered over Britain, and a sullen murmur arose from the middle of Scotland to the English Channel. At once, in 1815, the Lord Provost of Glasgow summoned the manufacturers to a discussion, and Robert Owen felt that he had an opportunity to preach his gospel. He proposed, first, that a petition for the abandonment of the tax on cotton should be drawn up and forwarded to

London. The meeting unanimously agreed with him. He then proceeded to point out the horrors that the cotton industry had brought upon the workers, and urged his fellow manufacturers to carry out some of the reforms which he had realized at New Lanark. Owen was never an eloquent man. He lacked the imaginative quality. But he had at least the necessary sentiment, and his fire at times touches his inartistic phrases until they seem to have a faint glow of eloquence. He appealed to their memories of the Scotland they had known before the factory system began, and spoke of the filth and squalor that their profitable trade had brought with it. Could they not afford to keep children under twelve out of the inferno? Could they not make enough money by asking only ten and a-half hours' work a day of the operatives? There was a glum silence; and when he proposed a motion not a soul among his Presbyterian hearers would second it.

We know at least the substance of his address, because he at once returned to New Lanark and expanded it into a pamphlet, which he distributed over the country. It burns with humane feeling. Owen, who did not know Scotland, probably exaggerated the worsening of life during the twenty years of the cotton-spinning industry. He took too rosy a view of the state of the workers before Watt and Crompton inaugurated the mechanical age. But his picture of the actual evils—the drink, disease, vice, dirt, and violence—was true; and he was not less just in claiming that the manufacturers were responsible for this and must alter it. That was his first idea of propaganda. He would induce his fellow capitalists to do what he had done at New Lanark. There was no response whatever. Possibly one here and there decided to give a little more to his church on the Sabbath, to extend the blessed influence of religion

among this diseased population. But spend ten thousand pounds out of their profits on schools and concerts and housing! Oh, no. They left it to the heretic and his barely Christian partners to do that sort of thing.

Owen sent a number of copies of his pamphlet to London, and in a little while he took coach and followed them. He was now, we must remember, a man of forty-five; a grave, quiet, dark, and slender man, of the most modest temperament and the most audacious ways. He seems to have lodged with his partner Walker, the best of his Quaker colleagues, and found his way about with little difficulty. One of the first to be visited was Francis Place, the atheistic tailor of Charing Cross, who was quietly doing more for the workers of England than all the iridescent orators it possessed. Owen puzzled and amused Place. They were both quiet and unselfish men; but Place, from familiarity with the metropolis, had a very different idea of the way to get things done. He loved intrigue and secret organization, and believed, correctly, that the Government would never move until the people compelled them. Owen, who thought evil of no man, told him that he was going to lay his plans before the Tory Premier and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he believed that, when they understood his happy experience at New Lanark, they would embody some of his ideas in legislation. Place, who had at his fingers' ends the story of the reform movement since Pitt had deserted it forty years before, gasped with surprise. Owen was probably quite unaware that the political system was at the time a swindle and an abomination.

How Owen did see the heads of the Conservative ministry, and what came of it, we will tell in the next chapter. Meantime he was writing a book which was to convince everybody. He had already finished two

"Essays on the Principle of the Formation of Character," and he was adding two more, and would then publish them under the collective title of *A New View of Society*. Place revised his manuscript for him, and induced James Mill, Bentham's intimate friend, to do the same.

It must have amused Place and Mill and Bentham—who were all Atheists—still more when Owen told them that he was going to Lambeth to read his manuscript to the Archbishop of Canterbury. So Owen believed in the convertibility of bishops as well as politicians! As I said, he believed every man who made a profession of goodwill until the man was proved to be destitute of it. Bishops made very clear profession of humane sentiments, and Owen did not doubt them for a moment. He soon numbered several bishops among his friends, and was on familiar terms with them. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Sutton, was a man of high character, profoundly concerned at the moral and social condition of the mass of the country. Owen was too simple in these matters to reflect that Sutton was also a politician, a leader of the House of Lords, the very stronghold of property and reaction. He would hear of no education that was not controlled by the Church, and he would be powerless to support any legislation that touched the pocket of the landowner or the manufacturer. But he received Owen very graciously at Lambeth Palace, and was an excellent listener. He invited Owen to attend a meeting at the City of London Tavern, at which the distress of the country was to be considered.

It must be borne in mind that Owen was by this time very well known in London. The future Tsar of Russia had stayed at his house. The leading foreign ambassadors, and large numbers of distinguished foreigners, had made the long journey to see his colony. No social experiment of that or any other time had been

so brilliant a success or attracted such wide attention. At the meeting, therefore, over which the Duke of York presided, he was invited to join the committee, under the Archbishop of Canterbury, which was formed for considering the distress.

Owen tells us that he was astonished at the ignorance of his distinguished colleagues, and the details he gives justify him. He pointed out two of the chief causes of depression: the inevitable reaction after the war and the displacement of human labour by machinery. The second theory surprised everybody, and the figures which Owen ventured to give on the spur of the moment were received with incredulity. Would he prepare a report for them? Nothing would please him better. He prepared a statistical paper, which showed that the figures he had given were really less than the truth. What was the remedy? Here he is a little vague in his account, but one gathers that he urged the remedies with which we are now familiar. The result was much the same as at Glasgow. Nothing was done, and the Archbishop's committee fades out of history. It was composed of men who looked for reforms which would cost nothing.

Meantime the House of Commons had appointed a committee to consider the administration of the Poor Laws, which Owen rightly regarded as a mere aggravation of the existing evil. He sent in his report and requested to be called as a witness. But it was now the beginning of 1817, and the cotton manufacturers were taking an invidious interest in this meddlesome idealist who was trying to cut the roots of their prosperity. The political world was being closed against him, as will be told in the next chapter. Let us first examine his *New View of Society*, which appeared before the end of 1816.

The first of the four essays, entitled "On the Forma-

tion of Character," goes straight to the point, in Owen's fashion, without any artistic introduction. There are, he says, fifteen million people in these islands, and "the characters of these persons are now permitted to be very generally formed without proper guidance or direction, and in many cases under circumstances which directly impel them to a course of extreme vice and misery." Seeing that the great majority of the fifteen millions went to church on Sundays, a good Christian might demur to this, but Owen ~~was~~ incapable of noticing such a point. There *were* the fifteen millions, mostly drunken and coarse, before their eyes. Owen was, as we are repeatedly informed, no economist. He paid too simple an attention to facts.

Just as simple is his next proposition. He thinks that legislators ought to "forget the petty and humiliating contentions of sects and parties," and study the subject; which is quite childish, of course. When they are ready to study the subject, he invites them to consider his twenty years' experience in the work. This, he says, may be summed up in his general principle, which he prints in large type, so that even the most short-sighted statesman may read it:—

Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men.

This was a gospel for legislators and employers; who buttoned up their pockets when they read the last part of the principle. Owen goes on to formulate a fundamental maxim for the individual. What personal goal or aim or ideal of life will you recommend to men and



women? He replies, in the familiar language of the Utilitarian school :—

The happiness of self, clearly understood and uniformly practised ; which can only be attained by conduct that must promote the happiness of the community.

All this is put bluntly and tersely. Owen never knew that there was an *art* of writing and speaking. He thought that it was enough to say things, if you had anything worth saying. Most readers will remember Holyoake's humorous remark on Owen's works. He recalls that some one has said that if you prick one of Montaigne's wonderful sentences it is so livingly human that it bleeds ; and he adds that if you pricked one of Owen's dry sentences you would "lose your needle in the wool." It is not quite true of these early writings. The sentiment is still fresh and passionate, though the style is poor. Owen ends his first essay with a graceful reference to "the Power which governs and pervades the universe," and a warm appeal to "the privileged few" to help the downtrodden millions.

In the second essay he announces a continuation and application of his principles. He comes down to humanity in the concrete, and urges us to see how diversities of character reflect diversities of environment. We must "have charity for *all* men," and not cherish a godly anger against the base. If our judges themselves had been born in St. Giles's, he says, and the criminals in St. James's, their places would be reversed. He invites his readers to go and visit the jails and the slums. They will understand better "the actions designated crimes." It follows that if you take your humans young enough you can make anything you like of them. He describes at great length his success at New Lanark. Now let the world hurry up and do the same everywhere.

It will be noticed that here Owen has at once struck a most important application of what some are pleased to call his "abstract principle": the application to crime. In London he visited the jails frequently. They were in those days fever-stricken dens of the most appalling vice and squalor. Judges had to sit in court surrounded by aromatic essences. The jails were the finest hotbeds of crime that could be imagined; and Owen, enlightened by his common-sense philosophy, saw the folly at once, and joined Elizabeth Fry in the demand for prison reform. Indeed, he went far beyond her and Howard's gospel of charity, and laid down the scientific principle that crime must be treated as disease. He makes one mistake. He overlooks the fact that criminals and drunkards were born in St. James's as well as St. Giles's. Environment is not everything. A man comes into the world with dispositions and tendencies. I am not sure that Owen is in this more to be blamed than the American sociologists who have traced criminals in certain families through several degrees of kindred, and concluded dogmatically that it was in the blood. They paid quite insufficient attention to the environment. Until the contrary has been proved in actual practice, some of us will continue to lean to Owen's belief that if you take your humans young enough you can check and eliminate their evil tendencies.

In the third essay he continues the description of New Lanark and the application of his principles. "The character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him," he repeats. He seems once to think of heredity, when he includes among the makers of a man's character "his predecessors"; but he merely means that they made his ideas and surroundings. He smites bigotry and war, as fruits of the principle opposed to his own, and recommends recreation and education. In the

fourth essay, after laying down the remarkable principle that "the end of government is to make the governed and the governors happy," he draws special deductions which will make for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." In order to show how fertile his "abstract principle" really was, and how Robert Owen surpassed every prophet of his time in the range of his reform ideas, I will put in a series the applications he gives:—

1. To establish a universal, uniform, unsectarian system of schools, with training colleges (which were then unknown) for teachers.

2. To establish a department of State which shall collect and publish each quarter the condition of labour, unemployment, and wages in every district.

3. To restrict the hours of adult labour to ten, and forbid the employment of children.

4. To institute public works (making roads, etc.) which shall absorb all who are left unemployed by private enterprise.

5. To revise the Poor Laws drastically.

6. To reform the jails and the administration of justice with the same thoroughness.

7. To reduce the number of licences and raise the duties on spirits.

8. To suppress the State lotteries and discourage gambling.

9. To reform the Church by abolishing tests and dogmas.

10. To get rid of religious intolerance and war.

•On these things he invites Parliament, the Church, and the People to co-operate. The method is easy; the result will put us beyond all earlier civilizations. "The revenues of all countries are derived, directly or indirectly, from the labour of man," and must not be spared for man's good. The Government must see that all have

work, and food, and instruction in rational modes of living. He admits, in a curious final paragraph, that this scheme is only a compromise with the existing bad system. It is not his ideal, but he is not a Utopian, and will reserve his full scheme "until the public mind shall be sufficiently prepared to receive it."

His full scheme of national economy will appear in time. It is enough here to insist that his famous principle, which provoked many a sneer and still evokes many a smile, was almost the best truth that any man could then hammer into the mind of England. Certainly one of the fundamental moral errors of his generation was to suppose that preaching could be useful without paying attention to men's material and intellectual environment. Just as certainly nearly all our great reforms of the nineteenth century have followed the lines of Owen's applications of his principle. Education, sanitation, housing, regulation of hours and conditions of labour, better recreation, prison reform, poor law reform, alcoholic liquor reform—all these things are precisely what Owen meant, *and said*. We have treated the nation more or less as he urged his fellows to do just a hundred years ago. We have, in practice, applied the doctrine of determinism. England has improved in precise proportion as we have done it. Owen rendered great service in boring all London, and England, with the repetition of his formula.

## V

### OWEN AS A "POLITICAL LUNATIC"

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE, the most loyal and eloquent and effective of Owen's pupils, could not resist the temptation at times to exercise his playful pen on the great master's naive ways. In one place he tells us that London folk, in 1816, must have regarded the prophet of the north as a "political lunatic." I have already hinted that Owen's approach to the political world seemed to such experienced people as Francis Place almost incredibly simple. For nearly twenty years before 1815 the Government had drastically persecuted reformers and friends of the people. Scores of them were in Botany Bay. Further scores, if not hundreds, were painfully familiar with the jail atmosphere which Owen denounced. And here was a man, who wanted universal education and the spending of hundreds of millions on the workers, at the same time curtailing their hours of labour, hobnobbing with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dukes of Kent and York, and proposing to call on Lord Liverpool and lay his plans before him.

Owen was no political lunatic, though his ignorance of the seamy side of politics was not much less than that of an inmate of Bedlam. There was an essential difference between Owen and other reformers. He was not yet a democrat. His scheme of benevolence was paternal. He appealed to landowners and manufacturers and statesmen to do these things for the workers; and he seems to have attached little or no importance to the

vote. He had no idea as yet—it will come very speedily—of altering the position of "the privileged few." It is most important to notice that, while he had spent tens of thousands in raising the workers at New Lanark, *he had made the mills pay far better than they had ever done under Dale*. Writers who talk too much about his simplicity forget this. With all his philanthropy he had raised the annual profit on the mills to more than £15,000. He had a general idea that others could do the same. He believed even that it would pay the State, seeing the waste of labour, to carry out his ideas.

I would go even further, and say that there were men in the Tory Government who wondered for a moment if he was not possibly right, and examined his schemes seriously. We must remember that the sullen state of the country put pressure on the Government. They were not left to the spontaneous impulses of whatever virtue they had. When the police report that large bands of grim, hungry workers are marching with banners inscribed "Blood or Bread," Premiers are forcibly reminded of a certain Sermon on the Mount which they had heard in church. That was the situation in 1816. Something had to be done.

Lord Liverpool and the Chancellor of the Exchequer gravely and respectfully discussed Owen's plans with him. They gave him the impression that his schemes were valuable and practicable. What is more curious is that Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, had two hundred copies of his book bound elegantly, with blank inter-leaves, and sent at Government expense to foreign Governments and Universities, inviting their comments. Surely that was more than Francis Place had expected. A copy was sent to Napoleon at St. Helena. Some of them were returned, with notes on the inter-leaves, and Owen was invited to see them. A copy was sent by the

American Government to every governor in the United States.

Presently Owen was informed that Sir Robert Peel (father of the great Sir Robert) would introduce a Bill in the House restricting the labour of children. Sir Robert had found grave abuses in his own mills, and had already secured the passing of a slight measure of relief for the workhouse orphans. The new Bill was to apply to all children. No child under ten should be employed; and for children under eighteen, the hours of actual work should be restricted to ten and a-half a day; and some schooling was to be provided. Not only were the ideas those of Owen, but he had practically drafted the Bill, as Mr. Podmore proves. Owen must have felt that his political friends were wrong, and that his own faith in the goodness of human nature was right, when, in June, 1815, Sir Robert Peel introduced his Bill into the House of Commons.

It was explained that there was no intention to press the Bill that year, and Owen spent the summer visiting mills and studying conditions in all parts of the country. By this time the manufacturers were alarmed. If Owen himself had, in the beginning, five hundred children working in the mills of New Lanark—probably a quarter of the whole of the operatives—we can gather to what extent the industry generally rested upon child labour. Agents of the manufacturers were sent to Scotland to gather any kind of evidence against Owen, and his work in London began to encounter furious and unscrupulous opposition. Some one submitted to Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, that Owen's first printed paper contained seditious expressions. Lord Sidmouth had read the speech, and he despised the insinuation. The agents concluded that the most hopeful line of attack was to open up the question of Owen's religious and moral principles.

The second reading of the Bill took place in the spring of 1816, and it was decided to set up a committee. Owen was the chief witness, and he was very severely heckled by the representatives of the manufacturers. Some passages were so offensive that they had to be omitted from the report of the proceedings. Men who were fighting, with gross selfishness, for profits which were built up on the virtual slavery and debauch of little children asked gravely what were Owen's religious beliefs, and what were the religious principles on which he based the education of his children. It was a sordid and hypocritical business. Other witnesses were brought to prove that his charges of long hours and evil conditions were exaggerated. False statistics were put in. Even medical witnesses were found who testified that the children in the mills were fine and healthy, and that long hours and night work were not injurious to health. Some submitted that shorter hours made for greater immorality.

Any person who is tempted to wonder if, perhaps, Owen had not exaggerated in his zeal ought to read the Blue Books on child labour in factories, published in 1832 by the Government. These officially describe the situation sixteen years after the date of Owen's statements, and they bear out every word that he said. The children, from the age of five upward, worked usually twelve hours, and in some places fourteen<sup>h</sup> hours, a day. Their moral and mental condition was revolting. But England was to become painfully familiar with these hypocritical attempts to defend a sordid spoliation in the name of religion and morals. Owen, fresh from his personal survey of the industrial hells of England and Scotland, fierily conscious from his own work how ten years of patient and loving treatment would change the face of England, fought strenuously for the lives of the children, but he soon found himself almost alone. His



bishop-friends fell away one by one. His political friends were too busy with politics. He was beaten, and the Moloch of the north went on devouring the children in their tens of thousands.

The parliamentary committee made no report to the House, and the Bill was indefinitely postponed. But the distress of the country grew worse and more threatening, and something had to be done. Another parliamentary committee was set up, to examine the Poor Laws, in the spring of 1817. Owen sent in to it the report which he had prepared for the Archbishop's futile committee, and asked to be called as a witness. For forty-eight hours he lingered about their promises, and he was at last given to understand that he would not be admitted to give evidence. The political door was closed.

The report which he sent in to the committee is of great interest, as it discloses something of the grand plan which he had announced at the close of his *New View of Society*. He repeated that the introduction of machinery was one of the chief causes of unemployment, and concluded that "advantageous occupation must be found for the poor and unemployed working classes, to whose labour mechanism must be rendered subservient instead of being applied, as at present, to supersede it." In view of the fact, moreover, that they were already demoralized by the factory system, a general scheme of education and supervision must be provided. In the earlier work he had recommended the making of roads, harbours, docks, etc.; and this labour was to be paid at less than the current rate, so as to avoid drawing labour from regular employment. Now he goes a long step further.

The ideal thing to do, he says, is to found new industrial committees of from five hundred to fifteen hundred souls. He encloses a sketch (reproduced in

Podmore's Life) of a village for twelve hundred workers, In a pleasant valley, far away from the existing towns apparently, lies a large rectangular structure, not unlike a monastery in shape. The four sides enclose a central garden and a few communal buildings, and the wings contain what we should now call "flats" for families, schools, common kitchens, dining rooms, etc. It is New Lanark built in the form of a great abbey or monastery. The land all round is supposed to belong to the community, and there are workshops of every description. In other words, it is both an industrial and agricultural community, entirely self-supporting, and provided with all the machinery for training the character of children and adults which had proved its value at New Lanark. These communities, he said at first, were suggested only for people who found no place in the regular industries.

The committee (which, of course, never did anything) rejected his report. It was published in William Allen's little periodical, *The Philanthropist*, and on April 9, 1817, it startled the public by filling whole columns of the *Times* and the *Morning Post*. Owen was making a new departure. From manufacturers he had turned to politicians, only to find that they were fellow conspirators, as Place had no doubt warned him. He now turned to the general educated public. Correspondence began, and Owen followed up his sketch by long letters in the *Times*. We need not speculate on the philanthropy of the *Times* and the *Post*. Owen at first bought 30,000 copies (at sevenpence each) of every issue containing his message, and sent one to every clergyman in England. One morning the country coach was delayed twenty minutes by Robert Owen's mail.

In the course of the discussion Owen developed his complete scheme of a new society. The whole population

was now to be drafted into these "Villages of Union and Co-operation," as he called them, and each was to have complete industrial, agricultural, and educational resources. From Owen's words it is clear that he was not merely working out his own ideas. He had in mind certain Shaker and Rappite communities in America, and an earlier English work by John Bellers. He was, as I said, supremely indifferent to questions of originality, and would be amused at the efforts of biographers to trace what he borrowed and what he himself contributed. His position was simple. Here are fifteen million people, living for the most part in squalor and misery while a few live in luxury. Here, on the other hand, is a plan by which the whole fifteen millions may live in comfort and happiness. Let it be realized. He quite appreciated that it would be a long job. He appealed for a beginning. He was himself quite ready, he said in the *Times*, to spend the rest of his days in such a community, living on twenty pounds a year and earning it.

It may seem incredible to many to-day, but Owen thus recovered the full attention of the public, forced politicians to reconsider him, and became, he says, "one of the most popular men in England." He did this by pushing a scheme of "rank Socialism" (though he did not yet use that word), or something like Communism. It was not "State Socialism," as he appealed to private enterprise and contributions for the means; but the public interest is extraordinary when we reflect that he quite plainly proposed a regime of equality. The *Times* could merely damn him with faint praise. Several members of the Cabinet lent their names to his committee, and the Dukes of Kent and Sussex still supported him. Again he saw success on the horizon, and he doubled his efforts. He spent £4,000 in two months in

the autumn of 1817. A single issue of the *Times* containing one of his long letters would cost him a hundred pounds, and he would print 40,000 large leaflets at a time. He would, he said, form a great national committee, headed by the Archbishops of England and Ireland, all the bishops and judges, and a host of peers, scholars, and reformers.

We may admit that the scheme was practically impossible, and that Owen was not sufficiently alive to the cost or sufficiently attentive to such details as commerce and transport. But, once more, we must judge Owen's scheme in the light of the conditions of his time, not ours. There was no network of railways then, and the shipping was relatively simple. The population was less than one-third what it is to-day, and, apart from London, the monstrous cities of to-day did not exist. Of the three million families of Great Britain the overwhelming majority lived on less than a pound a week, and their housing and other conditions were gross beyond description. There was still a tax on windows, and in the industrial north they lived in dark, drainless cellars where fever made its home with them. What Owen chiefly wanted was to shear away these grimy and squalid suburbs which were growing round Manchester and Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham, and plant the degraded workers in bright, healthy, self-supporting communities on pleasant rural sites. For agriculture he believed in the spade, as many still did; and England still produced practically all her food, and could produce more. Owen was very far from being a mere dreamer, and even so stern an economist as Ricardo lent his name (with reservations) to his committee.

But there were two sets of opponents, in addition to the chronic opposition of manufacturers who saw the raw material of their prosperity seriously threatened.

There was a growing school of economists whose device was (in effect) "*Laissez faire*"—"Let things alone": surely an appalling principle in such an age. In the sacred name of economic "laws" they forbade this arbitrary shifting of labour and altering of its conditions. The other opponents were the democratic politicians. Owen's scheme was "a new species of monkery," Cobbett said disdainfully. Jonathan Wooler, though he strongly appreciated Owen's spirit, was little less scornful of the plan. It was not democracy. A group of benevolent gentlemen and politicians were to take in hand a few thousand workers and make rules of life for them. Candidly, anything that satisfied a duke or a Cabinet Minister was suspect to them. They were for storming Westminster and winning political emancipation.

They were not quite so much wiser than Owen as they thought. They won their political emancipation in 1832; and it was followed by "the hungry forties."

As if this opposition were not enough, Owen now went on to give point to the vague hostility of the Churches by openly attacking "all the religions of the world." But let us first close the chapter of his political efforts. Sir Robert Peel was supposed to be ill from 1816 to 1818, and his Bill was held up. When it re-appeared in 1818 it was so much weakened by concessions that Owen would have nothing to do with it. The age limit was altered, and the appointment of inspectors, which was essential, was abandoned. It passed the Commons and was rejected by the Lords (spiritual as well as temporal), who appointed a new committee of inquiry. Even a parliamentary committee could not whiten the appalling facts, and the Bill became law—without inspectors. The Blue Books of 1832, of which I have spoken, prove how futile it was.

Robert Owen, the pioneer of education, was also the

pioneer of factory reform. Some writers on the subject in our time seem to have heard only of Lord Shaftesbury, or at the most of Sadler, Oastler, and Shaftesbury. All these built on Owen's work. Shaftesbury was not born when Owen began his work at New Lanark, and it was triumphantly finished before Shaftesbury knew what a factory was. He began to interest himself in children only after 1830; and it may be added that, as he was ironically reminded in the House, the labourers on the Shaftesbury estates in Dorsetshire, who were vilely treated, could do with a little of his philanthropy. Sadler began to work for the factory children only in 1823; Oastler later still. Robert Owen was twenty years in advance of them all, and it was his mighty and self-sacrificing efforts which stamped the facts on the mind of England and begot a growing feeling of shame.

## VI

### HE DEFIES THE CHURCHES

ON August 21, 1817, a very distinguished company flocked to the City of London Tavern to listen to the man of the hour, Robert Owen. He had held several meetings, and this was to be a continuation of a meeting adjourned from the fourteenth. No doubt many of them knew what Owen was going to do, and a scene was expected. These plans are very pretty, people had been saying for some time, and your moral tone is very nice, but *what* is your religion? Robert Southey, the poet, one of the men who had discovered that the only real bulwark against social justice was the Church, had turned pious, and now pressed Owen to make an act of faith. Owen was not the man to conceal anything. He had not considered that his humanitarian work was concerned at all with religion, and he had therefore not spoken about religion. He honestly thought that prelates and peers and people could co-operate in saving England in the way he indicated.

But when people suggested that he was concealing opinions and misleading the public, it was time to speak. Of those who question his "prudence" I take no notice whatever. It was not even a question of prudence. It was a question of the whole inspiration of the machinery by which he would regenerate England. Did love of one's fellows suffice, or must dogmas be introduced? Were we to go on encouraging what he called "the Evil Genius of the world"—the belief that a man's free will

enabled him to choose to be good or evil in any circumstances—or was the New Lanark principle to be honestly applied? Owen not only wrote out his speech, but had sixteen printed copies ready for the reporters. He was not going to complain afterwards of “inaccurate report.” The whole world should know. And he knew the price. He says in his Autobiography:—

When I went to this meeting I was on the morning of that day by far the most popular individual in the civilized world, and possessed the most influence with a majority of the leading members of the British Cabinet and Government. I went to the meeting with the determination by one sentence to destroy that popularity.

He began with an impressive sketch of the evil world that surrounded them and the beautiful new world he proposed that they should create. The transforming agency was simple. Why had the work not been done long ago? That, he said, no one had yet dared to say, but he would tell them. “Whatever may be the consequences,” he continued, “I will now perform my duty to you and to the world; and, should it be the last act of my life, I shall be well content, and know that I have lived for an important purpose.” Some of his listeners afterwards complained that he here adopted a dramatic, if not a melodramatic, pose; but surely one who thought himself one of the most popular and influential men in England, who wielded that influence solely on behalf of his fellows, yet believed that his honest words would destroy that influence for ever, could hardly be expected to trip the words lightly from his tongue.

The great work of regeneration had hitherto been prevented, he said, “solely in consequence of the errors—gross errors—that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion that has hitherto been



taught to men." He was not merely answering a challenge to avow his opinions. He was laying down the bases of the national task. "Unless the world is now prepared," he said, "to dismiss all its erroneous religious notions, and to feel the justice and necessity of publicly acknowledging the most unlimited religious freedom, it will be futile to erect villages of union and mutual co-operation." It was no use attempting to house under one roof people whose sectarian hostilities made common life impossible.

Owen waited, with a true and not unnatural sense of martyrdom, for the issue. A few clergymen who were presently feebly hissed. The majority were silent for a moment, and then, to his surprise, broke into a thunder of applause. In point of fact, few people knew each other's real opinions about religion in those days. They were days of genuine persecution. There were London magistrates who hounded men out of court if they confessed that they were not Christians. There were many men in jail for criticizing the accepted creed. It was quite common for a man to be a secret heretic. It was not Disraeli, but a politician of the previous century, who had said that the religion of every sensible man was to keep his religion to himself. One of the most respected figures in Owen's audience was that of Major Cartwright, the veteran political reformer. What was *his* religion? Everybody regarded him as a member of the Church of England, but we know that when some one asked him in private what his creed was he wearily answered: "I have had thirty, and will probably have thirty more before I die."

Owen seems never to have realized that his declaration of unbelief made little difference. The clergy already knew his opinions, and were hostile. Others, who wanted a pretext (as so many always do) for avoiding a reform

that cost money and effort, now supported the clergy. The *Times* announced: "The curtain dropped yesterday on Mr. Owen's drama"; but we shall see that this was far from true. Long afterwards Owen wrote that this was "the most glorious day of my life." It was only in the feeble days of his age, when he had become a Spiritualist, that he doubted if he had not gone too far. He is almost as wrong as his biographer Sargant, who makes this day the dividing line between success and failure in Owen's life.

The general feeling was probably well expressed by Brougham, who met Owen in the street and genially asked him: "How the devil did you dare to do it? If one of us had done it, he would have been burned." There is no doubt that Brougham, like most of the reformers, was a secret heretic. Even men like Place and Mill and Bentham made no parade of their atheism. But they merely regarded Owen as quixotic, and the work went on. Broadsheet after broadsheet was issued by Owen. He announced a periodical, *The Mirror of Truth*, and the opening of a "New State of Society Enrolment Office" in Fleet Street.

From the autumn of 1817 to the autumn of 1818 we find almost a blank in his record. He apparently returned to Scotland, possibly on account of his health or business, or both. We shall see presently that his power was by no means broken in London, and must not suppose that his speech had driven him north. Most probably the mills required prolonged attention.

In the autumn of 1818 Professor Pictet, a distinguished natural philosopher of Geneva University, came to New Lanark and begged him to visit France and Switzerland. He did not know French, but he entrusted himself to Pictet and set out. At London Baron Cuvier, one of the most eminent scientists of the day and connected with

the French Government, took charge of Owen as far as France was concerned. They crossed in a Government frigate. The Duke of Kent, scornful of the remonstrances of the pious, gave Owen a letter of introduction to the Duke of Orleans ; and at Paris, under a violently Catholic regime, he had a most honourable reception, both from statesmen and scholars. For six weeks he was the lion of Paris.

Pictet then took him to Switzerland, which did him no less honour. He visited the schools of the pioneer educationists, Pestalozzi, Oberlin, and Fellenberg, and arranged to send his sons to the latter for education. His loyal partner Walker then took him to Germany, where the royal reception continued, and he ended at Aix-la-Chapelle, where the monarchs of the Holy Alliance were meeting in conference. He was officially assured that the documents he submitted were among the most important that came under deliberation—he always took such assurances too seriously—and he returned, happy and heartened, to London.

In the spring of 1819 he was induced to contest a bye-election, but he made no serious effort, remaining in London all the time, and he merely lost the five or ten thousand pounds which an election cost in those corrupt days. At the same time he published in the London papers an "Address to the Working Classes." This was not yet the beginning of a change of policy. His main appeal was still to the rich, but he tried to interest the workers, forgetting how few of them a printed message would ever reach.

The Duke of Kent was still his most powerful supporter and warm friend. It was at this stage that the Duke sent Dr. Macnab to New Lanark, and was able to circulate in London his physician's enthusiastic description of the paradise on the Clyde. Owen pressed the

Duke and Duchess to see it with their own eyes, but a little event was expected in the family and the journey had to be postponed. The Duke took the chair at a meeting to form a new committee, and pointedly observed that it "did not matter what Mr. Owen's private opinions were." The success of the meeting shows that Owen's provocation of the clergy had not been so fatal as some imagine. The committee that was formed included both Dukes of the royal house, Kent and Sussex, such eminent parliamentarians as Sir Robert Peel and Sir W. de Crespigny, the economist Ricardo, and various other gentlemen and members of Parliament. They appealed for £100,000 wherewith to establish a model community.

But the combined opposition from so many quarters was bringing to a close this phase of Owen's career. Although the committee modified Owen's ideal, saying nothing about education and plainly disavowing communism, and represented the enterprise as one that would pay five per cent. on all capital invested in it, the response was poor, and the committee dissolved. The Duke of Kent died suddenly, and we may presume that many who had been favourable while he supported the plan now fell away. Sir W. de Crespigny, a very sincere adherent, moved in the House of Commons for the appointment of a Select Committee to consider Owen's plans, but he was defeated by 141 to 16 votes. Wilberforce, the "reformer," was most conspicuous in defeating the motion on religious grounds; as he was again in 1821.

Three years passed in somewhat weary and dispirited efforts to fan the dying cause. Owen wrote a long memorandum in reply to his economic critics, but failed to satisfy them. He submitted his paper to the authorities of the County of Lanark, but nothing was done. In 1821 his admirers founded *The Economist* for

the purpose of spreading his ideas, and in 1824 a Co-operative and Economic Society was started in London. These things we will consider later, in connection with the next phase of his ideas. In 1822 he established a British and Foreign Philanthropic Society for the purpose of establishing "communities for mutual interest and co-operation." He was clearly not dead yet, for a most distinguished audience attended his first meeting, and the support was very generous. Nearly all the foreign ambassadors in London, and many peers and eminent men, were Vice-Presidents. Sir John Graham, Lord Brougham, Mr. Hume, and other leading Liberals were on the active committee. At the first meeting subscriptions to the amount of £50,000 were announced; of which, it must be said, a fifth was given by Owen himself. But we hear no more of the society, and shortly afterwards Owen's restless eye was caught by what he thought to be a greater opportunity.

The distress in England was grave during all these years, but it was even graver in Ireland, and Owen decided to see what could be done there. He had an enthusiastic Scottish disciple, Captain Macdonald, an officer in the engineers; and with Macdonald and an agricultural expert he, in the autumn of 1822, made a tour of the whole island. His reception was, as usual, most encouraging. The Lord Lieutenant, the Marquis of Wellesley, received him with distinction at Dublin Castle, and examined his plans and theories. A large number of the Irish peers were genuinely interested and anxious to help. Even the bishops were not unfriendly.

While staying with the Duke of Leinster at Carton, near Maynooth College, Owen was invited to visit that famous Roman Catholic centre. Dr. Crotty, the president, received him amiably, and proposed that he should come again to discuss his theories with a group of

Catholic scholars. The meeting was arranged some weeks later, but it could hardly be described as a conference, much less a debate. Owen spoke for two hours, and they seem to have concluded that that was speech enough for one day. Dr. Crotty assured him, however, that the Roman Catholics would not oppose him. Sargant suspects the prelate of Jesuitry, and adds an amusing experience of Owen after his return to London. Mme. Tussaud wished to have a model of the celebrity in her wax-works, and Owen sat to the modellers. But the model was never exhibited. Her Jesuit confessor told Mme. Tussaud, Sargant says, that she might exhibit as many murderers as she liked, but not an infidel.

Owen lingered in Ireland until the spring. On March 1 he addressed a letter to the nobility, gentry, clergy, and people of Ireland, inviting them to attend a great meeting in the Rotunda, Dublin, on the eighteenth. It was crowded with as distinguished an audience as Ireland could afford. The Lord Mayor was in the chair, supported by many peers and eminent scholars. Owen spoke for three hours, and, poor speaker as he was, made a great impression. But when he had finished, the clergy began. Did he want to unsettle the workers until everybody wanted to be a gentleman, one asked? Ireland is not the land of wit it is popularly supposed to be, but there must have been many in Dublin who saw the humour of that question in the distressed Ireland of 1823. Two other clergymen followed. Owen's theories, they said, were immoral and irreligious. Again one may suppose that there were a few who saw the humour of asking them, in the name of religion and morals, not to permit Robert Owen to lift up the British and Irish workers of 1823 to the level of New Lanark.

Once the religious cry had been raised, all hope was extinguished. The meeting was adjourned until April 12,

when a huge painting of a model "Village of Union" confronted the audience. It was again distinguished and generally respectful, but no progress was made. It was resumed on April 19, with the same result. On April 24 a select audience waited on Owen at a semi-private meeting, and the Hibernian Philanthropic Society was launched. Lord Cloncurry, Sir Frederic Flood, Sir William Brabazon, Sir Capel Molyneux, General Browne, and other prominent Irishmen, cordially supported it. There was a flicker of enthusiasm, a rapid and brief inflow of subscriptions—then the customary silence in the historical records. Owen returned to New Lanark, and his organization slowly melted away. But will any man venture to affirm that no seed was left in the mental soil of Ireland after those six months of agitation and education? Let us say at least that the iron soil was ploughed a little.

## VII

### UNDER THE STARS AND STRIPES

WE now come to the most real and intelligible dividing-line in the life of Robert Owen. Hitherto he had certainly not been a democrat, if that word is taken to mean a man who thinks that the people must manage their own affairs. One may be bold enough to say that he was too honest to be a 'democrat.' The workers of England were then quite incapable of managing their own affairs, and Owen refused to flatter them, as some did. If manhood suffrage had been granted at that time, with the usual restriction of political rights to those who could at least read, not twenty per cent. of the workers would have been entitled to it; and of the twenty per cent. very few had more than a mere sham of education. Owen, we must remember, flung no words at "the common people." No man more sincerely wished their welfare, or made more sacrifices for it. He wanted to educate them first. This must be done by the State, or, failing the State, by benevolent wealthy individuals.

Seven years' bitter experience had now taught him that there were such things as malice and greed in the world. If the uplifting of the workers meant that the corrupt power of politicians or the partly ill-gotten wealth of the manufacturers was threatened, there was not going to be an uplifting of the workers. From sheer force of logic Owen must now turn to the workers. We can imagine that he was bewildered and befogged. Capital was essential for the realization of his plans, and the workers



had then no capital. To-day the workers of Britain could, without any sacrifice, raise a million pounds in a month. In 1824 they could not have raised a million in a year, and they had no organization whatever for raising any sum. Trade Unionism had to come first, as Place understood.

While Owen pondered these things, an invitation came from beyond the seas which seemed to him to open a new and most promising chapter. He was well aware that there was in America an industrial and agricultural community which many compared with his own ideal village. A German dissenter and religious fanatic, named Rapp, and his followers had purchased thirty thousand acres of land on the banks of the Wabash, in the State of Indiana, and established a prosperous community which they called "Harmony." In 1824 an emissary of the Rappites came to Scotland to tell Owen that they wanted to sell their estate, and move elsewhere. Leaving his mills in the charge of his son Robert Dale, and taking another son, William, with him, he crossed the Atlantic in the last month of 1824.

Once more, in his invincible optimism, he caught a glimpse of the promised land. Here was a country—he little knew it—where life was not clogged by the age-old traditions and vices of Europe. Here was a young Republic, heir to the splendid spirit of Paine and Washington and Franklin and Adams and Jefferson—all Deists and humanitarians like himself—untrammelled by the interests of great landowners and capitalists. Here was soil of the most fertile description and the most modest price. Above all waved the flag of freedom, and through all—it was understood—ran the spirit of brotherhood and mutual aid. With his remarkable faculty for seeing the good in everybody, and failing to see the evil, he was quite unaware that the politicians who greeted

him in New York were more corrupt than the politicians of Westminster ; for Tammany had then been installed there for twenty years. He did not know that the House of Representatives, which he was invited to address at Washington, was already infected by the Tammany spirit which would soon place General Jackson in the presidential chair and inaugurate a long period of corruption.

With Congress, however, he was little concerned. He crossed the mighty corn-lands of the middle-east, and examined the Rappite estate. The fertile soil had answered the call of the industrious fanatics. Corn and pasture and vineyard flourished. Mills and workshops had been raised to meet industrial needs. Twenty thousand acres of good soil surrounded the village, and promised support for thousands. For £28,000 he could buy the whole little kingdom, houses and workshops included. He drew £28,000 from his private fortune, and invested it without wincing. For an immoral and irreligious man he did strange things. He flung the call to freedom and happiness over the cities of America, and in the early summer, in the few glorious weeks between the hard American winter and the torrid American summer, he must have felt that he had reached his haven.

Apparently he was busy evangelizing in the cities. William recalled him with the news that things were going rather *too* well. Eight hundred eager colonists had already arrived during his absence, and every coach brought more. The housing was insufficient. The industrial classification was difficult, as most of them were ready to do "anything," but had never learned to do anything in particular. Some were bright-eyed enthusiasts, whose strong point is generally talk and advice. Some were adventurers. Owen went down to the Wabash and contrived to get some sort of order.

He postponed his regime of absolute equality. For a few years every man would be credited at the stores for the precise value of the work he did. Many murmured at this concession to the wicked ideas of the old world. But Owen heard not. He gave them their constitution and his blessing, and returned to attend to his affairs in Scotland.

He was back in "New Harmony," as he christened the place, early in 1826, with a band of Scottish recruits and a group of American enthusiasts. William reported a lack of skilled labour, and an abundance of unskilled; and as houses were not numerous enough, and there were no building materials in that region, the colonists were rather uncomfortable. Owen viewed the whole through his rose-tinted glasses. They had made so much progress, he said, that he would inaugurate the regime of equality at once. A burst of general enthusiasm greeted the new constitution he gave them in February. They were to own everything in common and equally. After all, if a man was lazy, his character had been made *for* him, and not *by* him. That, as a matter of fact, is precisely what Owen forgot until it was too late. The characters of these men were already made, *by others*; and they had not been made with a view to co-operative life.

The wise few begged Owen to remain for a year and direct the undertaking, which he consented to do. Progress was made, but it was not long before the elements of disharmony appeared. They have appeared in every such colony before and since, and it is hardly necessary to read Owen's and his son's account. The guiding star of Owen's creed was that people should be happy. The majority, or a very large number, interpreted that in their own narrow way, and the place rang with dances and entertainments until the work suffered.

Industrious Puritans frowned. These loafers and libertines were living on their labour, they said. Religious discussion crept in. There was the usual proportion of men who wanted to base everything upon religion, and of men who would relegate religion to the museum of antiquities. Political differences found an opening. Was this a democratic show or not? "Then why," the enthusiast retorted, if you answered in the affirmative, "are we to accept constitutions and rules from a benevolent autocrat?" The perennial drink question appeared. People who preferred tea could not possibly be expected to live on equal terms with people who drank beer.

Social life, also, was not as easy as the theory supposed. Many educated people will cultivate brotherly love in the most virtuous degree if the brother will keep his distance. An American worker of those days could be rather trying. Only a few years ago, when I approached an American city by night, I noticed that one great and gorgeous electric advertisement outshone all others. When I got near enough I found that it was an advertisement of chewing-tobacco. The state of things was far worse in 1825. In the dances and social meetings, therefore, the harmonious colonists fell into groups of brothers-at-a-distance.

The school was the only thing that really went well. William and Robert Dale Owen taught in it, and the father took a deep interest in the four hundred children. It must be added to the many triumphs of Robert Owen that he got American boys to behave themselves! Otherwise, things went from bad to worse. Who was to do the dirty work? Theoretically, in a Socialist community, all are eager for it, and you have to draw lots to settle who is to be omitted. At New Harmony it was very different. Owen, or somebody, devised an ideal

costume, a jacket and wide pantaloons—ladies, a long coat and wide pantaloons—and some said rude things about those who adopted it. The food was abundant, but far from superfine. “There is Robert Owen,” some said, “drinking good tea and coffee at the hotel while we have this swill.” The houses and furniture were rough. The general aspect of the place was pretty much what the general architectural aspect of a fifth-rate American town is now. The careless people wasted much ; which tested the Owenite virtue of the frugal.

In 1827 the restless crowd split into groups, and asked Owen to break up the estate into separate colonies. Owen generously gave each group a ten-thousand-year lease of a plot of land, at a nominal rent. If they preferred to work in black, blue, yellow, and white groups, let them do it. Unfortunately, the multiplication by fissiparity, as a biologist would say, went so far that nothing remained of the original society except its handsome constitution. All these things Owen endured with more than patience. He persisted in believing in ultimate success. What really pained him, in the spring of 1827, was that his ablest assistant, Maclure, quarrelled seriously with him about money. Maclure had the bad taste, or evil mood, to advertise that he would be responsible for no debts incurred in the joint names of Owen and himself. He led one of the largest sections. When he went on to claim that Owen owed him money, and threatened a law-suit, friends intervened, and arbitrators were accepted ; and they found that the Scotchman owed Owen five thousand dollars.

It was time to think of retiring. The original society had now become ten mutually hostile daughter-societies, and many of the best colonists returned in sorrow to “the old moral world” of Philadelphia or Boston or Washington. Owen paid a flying visit to England, and

then made a lecturing tour over the States. After a last effort to rally the scattered and hostile colonists, he concluded sadly that it was useless to try his great experiment with men and women "trained in the individualist system, founded as it is upon superstition." On June 22, 1828, he called a general assembly, and bade them a dignified and dispassionate farewell. He left there two of his sons, and Robert Dale was naturalized and became a prominent and powerful American reformer. It is recorded in the history of New York that the only political body which maintained its civic purity in that city in the whole of the nineteenth century was Robert Dale Owen's short-lived Workers' Party. As to "New Harmony," its lands were soon absorbed by men whose one ideal was to make money.

With his faith in man's possibilities undimmed, his nobility of character unchanged, Robert Owen left the Stars and Stripes flying at the Battery Point, sailed by the great ironic statue of Liberty, and returned to the warm Scottish hearts at New Lanark. He had sunk £40,000, four-fifths of his fortune, in the estate by the Wabash, and would never, he knew, recover a single cent of it. He had given £1,500 out of his first £3,000 to educational bodies. He had spent no man knows how much on New Lanark, or how much on his London propaganda. He had for thirty years used one half of his great commercial ability for unselfish tasks. He now, placidly as ever, returned to live, and support his dependents, on a fifth of a diminished fortune. I have been unable to resist the temptation to shed a little humour by the way in describing that unhappy community by the laughing waters of the Wabash. But the reader would not misunderstand. The failure was not due to Robert Owen or his principles. It was due to his too sanguine belief that only people with his own spirit

would go out from the cities at his call. He did not yet know what puerile and unworthy sentiments still linger in reform movements. As for him, the crucible did not refine him, for in him there was no dross.

And here a biographer has to record one of the most singular facts of his career. You fancy, perhaps, that I exaggerate in saying that Owen's temper was not soured, at least for a time. You fancy that the truth probably is, behind all the fine phrases of his panegyrists, that he returned to Braxfield House in a mood of resentment which no just man will blame, and that for the time he decided to nurse the remnant of his fortune and let ungrateful humanity drift. Listen.

In less than three months of his return to Britain he was on ship again, bound for America, and bent on starting a new colony. He was in London in August (1828). There he heard, or had heard in America, that there was a vast province of fertile and unused land in Texas, which at that time belonged to Mexico. At once he told the Mexican ambassador to make an application for it in his name. The ambassador tried to discourage him, telling him that there was no prospect of success. He would not listen to discouragement, and he, apparently, would not await the answer of the Mexican Government. In November he took ship to Vera Cruz. "The world was ripe for moral reform," he told everybody; less than six months after his desolate leave-taking at New Harmony.

On the way to Mexico City he fell among rebels. Mexico was enjoying one of its periodical disturbances, and Robert Owen found himself surrounded by the wildest and fiercest-looking set of soldiers he had ever yet seen. We are hardly surprised to learn that he at once began to preach his gospel to them, through interpreters, and won their deep respect. They sent him on,

under a safe conduct, to the man they hated in Mexico City, and the President received him with distinction. He could not give Texas for a new social experiment, but he would grant, if Congress agreed, a strip of a hundred and fifty miles of territory on the United States border. Owen agreed, but Congress did not, and he calmly made his way to the United States. Any other man in the world would have hated the sight of it.

It appears, however, that he had engaged himself in the previous year to hold a debate at Cincinnati. The clergy of America had been active against him, and he had flung out a challenge to them to meet him in debate. A fiery and fluent Universalist preacher, the Rev. A. Campbell, had accepted the challenge, and had made arrangements while Owen was in Britain. March drew to a close, and there was no sign of Owen. They knew only that he was somewhere in the wilds of Mexico, and must pass through the rebels and make a long sea journey to reach them. Early in April, however, a gun-brig of the British Navy sailed up the Ohio with the missing champion of humanity on board, and on April 13 an audience of about a thousand persons gathered to witness the great duel.

It was once said that when Owen called a meeting no man on earth could say at what hour it would close. He had met a kindred spirit in Mr. Campbell, and the debate, which began at nine every morning, dragged on for eight days! There was a "stenographer," as the Americans love to call a shorthand-reporter, and the published debate runs to 550 pages of small print.

It is the most amusing debate I ever read. The two combatants differed at the start about the subject of it. Owen said that he had come to attack only the one error of religion ("associated with religion," he used to say) which was opposed to his famous principle; and we



know that this was the only aspect of religion he would ever discuss. But the Rev. Mr. Campbell, bursting with scores of learned apologies for Christianity which he had accumulated, insisted that the issue was the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. The result was that each took his own course and paid very little attention to the other. Owen read out reams of papers on his social and moral philosophy. Campbell slaughtered imaginary Deists, Atheists, and Pagans until he was purple. One of his speeches lasted twelve hours, on three successive days. When he had finished, Owen continued his suave exposition of his humanitarian creed.

The printed debate (*Debate on the Evidences of Christianity*, 1839) is interesting for two reasons. It contains, in the first place, one of the most reasoned and elaborate statements of Owen's creed. It adds some points—such as a claim of perfect equality of the sexes—to those we have already seen. It touches marriage, and shows that, though Owen was clearly liberal and very severe on the existing state of things, he undoubtedly believed in marriage. But it is most interesting as evidence of the real state of Owen's opinions on religion; though Campbell, who edited it alone, has given a false title to the volume.

I have so far spoken of him as a Deist, but he had not used the word "God" for very many years. Now, in spite of all Mr. Campbell's frenzied denunciations of "atheism," with the insinuation that Owen accepts that system and conceals the fact, Owen still never uses Theistic terms. At one point he exclaims, rather by way of illustration (p. 104): "When we use the term Lord, God, or Deity, we use a term without annexing to it any definite idea." Christian doctrines he very plainly rejects as "fables of antiquity." On another page (p. 164) he rejects atheism, but it happens that this

particular page is so confused and imperfectly reported as to be unintelligible; though, of course, Owen would never have said that he was an Atheist. But the crucial passage is as follows (p. 217):—

Those who understand the signs of the times see plainly that ere long religion must receive its death-blow. Instead of a system which derationalizes the human race, other times are approaching when we shall have our attention and our faculties directed to what we can comprehend—to the acquisition of real knowledge and to the investigation of the laws of matter; and, my friends, for us to attempt the investigation of any other laws *but* material laws is every whit as futile as an attempt to fly from the earth to the sun. Depend upon it that you only waste your time in such searching after immaterial things.....in speculations upon subjects beyond the comprehension of human faculties.

This is decisive. Owen was an Agnostic in the prime of his life. In 1801 he had last used the word "God." In 1816 he spoke of a "Power that governs the universe." That is the fringe of Agnosticism. In the prime of his life, the period of his greatest work and sacrifices for his fellows, he was an Agnostic. Mr. Campbell expressly taunts him for not believing in immortality.

I may take the occasion to finish here with Owen's views on religion, until, in his feeblest old age, he adopted Spiritualism. Writing in his periodical, *The New Moral World*, in 1835, he defines the religion of his movement. It believes, he says, in an "eternal, uncaused existence," which "governs the universe" (that is to say, "directs the atoms"). Herbert Spencer hardly differed from this. This "Power," Owen proceeds, has not given man faculties with which he can comprehend "the nature of its existence"—note the "its"—and therefore such knowledge is not necessary to man's well-being. Prayer,

he says, is quite useless, and no form of worship whatever is allowed. Mr. Podmore rightly says that this is what we should now label "Agnosticism," but he very inconsistently calls Owen "a Deist after the fashion of the eighteenth century." On the contrary, he is an Agnostic after the fashion of Hume. Voltaire or Paine would never have consented to this abstract "Power" and "Existence" of unknown attributes. Owen's entire inspiration was human. What he thought himself about the matter when he was eighty-five years old, and a Spiritualist, is irrelevant. During his whole manhood he was an Agnostic.

## VIII

### THE CO-OPERATIVE PHASE

CO-OPERATION was, we saw, one of the most familiar words in Owen's vocabulary. The ideal communities which obsessed him all his life were to be "Villages of Union and Co-operation." He had almost a monopoly of the word in those days. But he used it in a sense necessarily different from that which it bears in the days of our great Co-operative Movement. He meant merely "acting together," in work and life, for the common good. He meant further that the rich and the poor were to act together, though in the sense that the rich would find the funds and brains for the common enterprise. We saw how, for a year or so, he went beyond this, and plainly sought equality; but that was too severe a shock for his friends. Habitually, he meant by co-operation that each class should contribute its special stores: capital and wisdom on the one hand, manual labour on the other.

To prevent misunderstanding, it must be added that Owen did not in this sanction the conventional views of his middle-class world, as is often said. On the contrary, decades before Karl Marx he held that labour determined the value of things. He held that all his life, from 1815 onward. He was always willing to allow the justice of five per cent. on capital, but he clearly wanted, and generally induced, his wealthy friends to contribute also their brains. By labour he meant work both of brain and muscle, though he chiefly regarded the latter in

determining prices. We shall see clearly soon that he disliked the capitalist system and wanted to see it disappear. But until he saw an alternative, as he thought, he could not move a step without using the capitalist system.

The main point which concerns me here is his supposed life-long dislike of democracy. I have already pointed out that up to Owen's middle age, and even beyond, the workers of England had scarcely produced a single champion for their own class. Owen certainly never made this a complaint. It was the very essence of his gospel that as long as the workers were kept in such abominable conditions, doing some seventy-five hours' work a week, totally illiterate, and encouraged in coarseness, they could not help themselves. The more fortunate must help them. This was still true in 1830. Every man of power in England, every reformer, was a middle-class man. When we add that large capital was needed to realize Owen's plans, and there was as yet no organization of workers whatever to raise even small capital, we quite understand his position.

But we have reached a stage when Owen almost despairs of the help of statesmen or the wealthy, on the one hand, and finds a remarkable stirring among the people themselves on the other. It is most interesting to follow him through this phase, and few writers who do it are quite just to him.

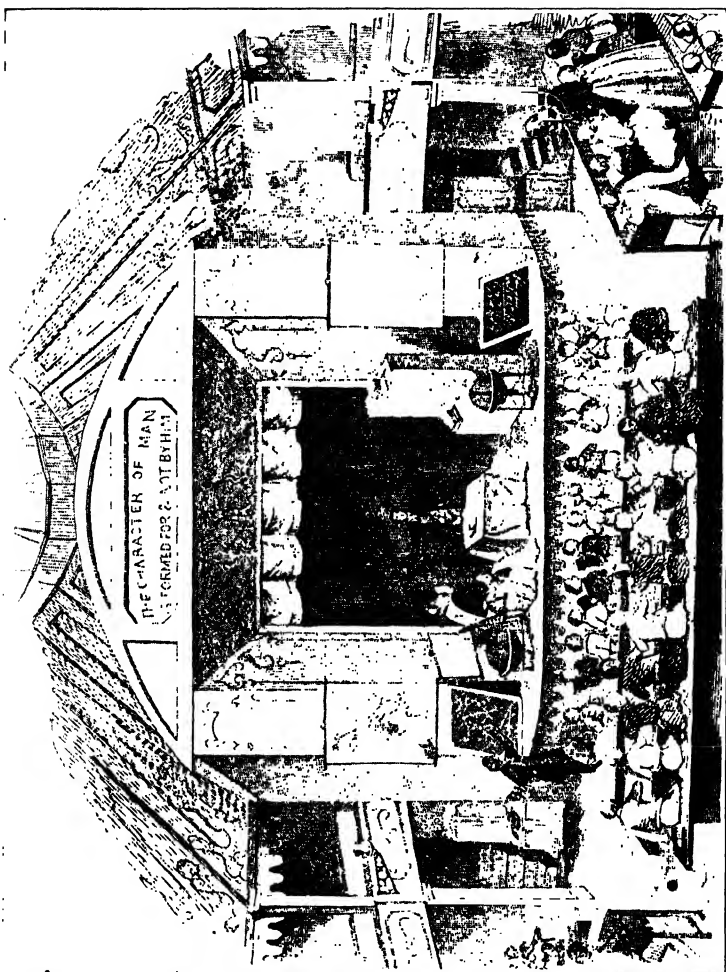
During the three months which he spent in England in the summer of 1828 he seems to have severed his connection with New Lanark. Undoubtedly this was largely due to Allen's puritanical interference, though one may doubt if Owen would ever again have settled down in the far north. Sargant, who apologizes for nearly all Owen's opponents, has to confess that as soon as Owen withdrew from New Lanark wages were

reduced and hours of work increased. What Owen's financial position then was is not very clear. Robert Dale Owen tells us that the father had, some time previously, settled on him and his brother £20,000 in shares in the mills, and they returned this when his funds ran low. This must have been before he left New Harmony. The plainest information we have is that from 1829 onward he had £300 a year, or the interest on £6,000. Had he thought less of his fellows, he would at that time have had £6,000 a year. One turns back with a smile to the Rev. Mr. Campbell's eloquent proofs that *his* religion alone could inspire love and sacrifice!

Many a reader will wonder, too, how Caroline Owen fared through all these years of travel and trouble. She kept a stout heart, reared her family, and told her husband constantly in her letters that she was proud of his great labours. Owen had never attempted to modify her creed. He had even suffered her to teach it to their children, and he only smiled when young Robert Dale once tried to convert him to Christianity. After the troubles of 1829 Caroline removed with her three daughters to a smaller home. But one daughter died in 1830, the mother died in 1831, a second daughter died in 1832, and the third and last joined her brothers in America. Owen had become a homeless and comparatively poor man. He might still have won a moderate fortune and retired to nurse his memories. Instead, he set out upon a more vigorous and less profitable campaign than ever for the good of his fellows. To finish with his finances, by 1844 he had again given away all his money. Robert Dale, a worthy son, contrived so to cook the accounts of the affairs between him and his father as to make it appear that £6,000 stood to the credit of his father; and he paid him six per cent. on this until he died.

Owen moved to London. A good deal had grown since 1824 out of the seed he had sown there. We saw that in 1821 the *Economist* had been established to propagate his views. In the same year there was formed at London a "Co-operative and Economic Society" which aimed at getting funds to build a Village of Union. With the customary impatience it made a small start with a few houses in Spa Fields and came to grief. More important was the London Co-operative Society, founded in 1824. Its purpose was to educate, and in the rooms which it successively occupied the champions of Owenism—who at that time included Thirlwall, the later bishop and historian—met the Radicals in deadly verbal combat. John Stuart Mill, Roebuck, Charles Austen, and all the leaders of the Philosophic Radicals, went there. Owen refers to them in one of his speeches as "the respectable individuals now denominated political economists," and declares that "their theories and their doctrines would only produce misery to the human race." He meant, of course, the principle of *Laissez-faire*, and the reader may judge whether that principle, checking and forbidding State action until the close of the century, was not actually the cause of great misery. In its name Cobden and Bright and other humane men violently resisted every attempt to restrict the appalling hours of the workers.<sup>c</sup>

Constant efforts were made to establish the model village which was to prove to the world the efficacy of Owen's scheme. The most famous of these enterprises was at Orbiston, near Motherwell; but as Owen had no share in its foundation or control I do not linger over it. An estate at Motherwell had been offered to Owen before he left New Lanark, and for some years he had some hope of carrying the matter through. He withdrew on account of differences with his colleagues, and the new







scheme at Orbiston was entrusted to a very enthusiastic Owenite but unsuitable organizer, Abram Combe, brother of the phrenologists Andrew and George Combe. A capital of £50,000 was subscribed, and one wing of a very handsome structure was raised; but the colonists were of the wrong type from the start, and when Combe died in 1827 the costly experiment failed.

In 1826 hope was kindled once more by the announcement that a Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society had bought an estate and begun to build. The bubble burst, as usual, in a few weeks. Cork was the next to attract attention and disappoint expectations. London founded a Co-operative Community Fund Association, in which shares could be purchased for four shillings a week. Owen was clearly turning to the people. In the next year, 1827, a Union Exchange Society was formed at the London Co-operative Society's headquarters in Red Lion Square. They would raise a fund by bringing their home-made cakes and cabinets and boots to a common mart and giving a tithe of the profit to the central treasury. For six months this novel market enlivened the Holborn district of the metropolis. I find that even co-operators in the north of London have so far forgotten Owen as to call this sort of thing to-day "an American tea." We shall presently see it on a larger scale. At Brighton, in the same year (1827), a Co-operative Benevolent Fund Association made a more promising start. It ran a paper and a very brisk exchange (on the basis of labour-value), opened a school, and began to look about for a farm. •

All these little ebullitions of the Owenite ferment, which are hopefully chronicled in the *Economist* and the *Co-operative Magazine*, and may be read in Holyoake's history of the Co-operative Movement or Podmore's Life of Owen, are interesting to us as symptoms of the very

real influence that Owen had in the country. He had tens of thousands of ardent followers scattered from Cork to Londonderry, from Brighton and Plymouth to Aberdeen. His great scheme of a national transformation would never be realized, but he was steadily transforming thousands of indifferent men into enthusiastic workers for the social good. Writers who criticize him for diverting the attention of so many to the pursuit of an illusion take too narrow a view of his action. He was planting a great moral and educational ideal, which reared its shining crest high above all the sectional political and economic aims of the time, in the mind of Britain. It was a great service, and we shall see that out of the general pool of moral energy which he created vivifying streams flowed in time into all the great practical movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Sectional reforms suffer from that very narrowness which makes them effective. Even to-day they would gain by being linked together in a vast inspirational ideal of a moral character.

At the time, however, there was quite reasonable ground for thinking that the Owenite scheme itself might be realized. Owen had definitely turned to the people. There was to be co-operation in founding communities as well as co-operation in conducting them. The response was, for those days, very encouraging. By the year 1830 there were thirty co-operative societies in London and nearly three hundred societies, with 20,000 members and nine journals, in the United Kingdom. By 1832 the number had grown to between four and five hundred. There was a British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge, and new periodicals constantly appeared. In 1831 the first Co-operative Congress was held at Manchester, linking the various societies together for "Mutual Co-operation, United Possessions,

and Equality of Exertion and the Means of Enjoyment." This, of course, was Socialism, and the name now began to be used to denominate the followers of Robert Owen. A congress was held every six months from that date, and Owen himself generally presided.

For the general reader it should be added that these years do not form a proper part of the Co-operative Movement as we now understand it. The Rochdale Store, which begins the real history of the Co-operative Movement, was not opened until 1844. By that time the general Owenite ideal was not dead, as some say, but split up into more effective partial ideals. The time had come for forming special organizations for special purposes. The Co-operative Movement of the thirties, which seemed so promising for a time, was Owenite in the general sense. The ultimate aim of the great majority of the societies was to found a community or help in founding a community. The members worked and lived as other men did, but they had the dream of one day leaving their grimy homes and workshops and founding a co-operative colony in some green valley or on some breezy hill-side far from "the old immoral world."

Paper succeeded paper, and one new organization (or new name) succeeded another. The *Crisis* was Owen's organ from 1832 to 1834, and his latest organization was an "Association of the Intellectual and Well-Disposed of the Industrious Classes for removing Ignorance and Poverty." The name is not without significance. He looks no longer to either the State or the "idle rich," for assistance. The "industrious classes," the mental and manual workers, are to unite and free their fellows from ignorance and poverty. He was very far indeed from neglecting "the people" and wishing only to found comfortable colonies for a few. For thirty years he had

pressed as no other man in England did for the general education of the people. But it was still from the middle class and the educated workers that he drew most of his followers.

It is commonly said that Owen slighted the early co-operative experiments (stores or exchanges) except in so far as they promised funds for the establishment of a colony, and is therefore not properly enumerated among the founders of the Co-operative Movement. Even if this were so it would remain true that the Co-operative Movement was launched chiefly by his followers. A high proportion of the "Rochdale Pioneers" were Owenites, and they took their inspiration from the Owenite shops as well as the Owenite gospel. The great apostle of the movement was George Jacob Holyoake, the most prominent and thorough of Owen's disciples. But it was only at a later date that Owen slighted the concrete experiments in favour of his general ideal. The story of the famous London Exchange puts his position more clearly.

We saw that Owen had long held that labour was the standard by which we ought to value commodities. In 1830, when his Association opened an Exchange Bazaar in Hatton Garden, he recommended the use of labour-notes instead of coin as a medium of exchange. It is clear that he was at this time dreaming of abolishing the money-system altogether. In his communities there would be no money. In 1832 he wrote an article on the subject, in the *Crisis*, and worked out his theory. Labour and knowledge (or manual and mental labour), he said, make the value of an object, apart from the raw material. The time expended in fashioning it must be used as a measure in determining the value, and the proper currency would be a note expressing the price of the hours of labour and the raw material. This note

would purchase other commodities priced in the same way. The average value of labour in London he, to get rid of a very complex set of differences, put at sixpence an hour—a fair average in those days.

We need not stay to examine this economically. It was an expedient to meet the existing situation, and it is on that ground that Owen speaks of these things as small in comparison with his great national ideal, which—as economic critics generally forget—aimed at a complete *moral* regeneration. A French economist, quite critical but more just than some of the English, says that Owen united the practices of Abraham and the theories of Babeuf. It is something to hear the name of a not undistinguished economist connected with his. But Owen merely looked for once at the existing system. At New Lanark he had given his people goods at three-fourths the price charged by shopkeepers. That was after paying interest on the capital invested in his store. He would go a step further and dispense with capital.

The initial weakness was that he really tried to supply the place of the indispensable capital by philanthropy. That would at once have spoiled his scheme economically, but he was not trying an economic experiment. Just about this time an admirer named Bromley had put at his disposal a large building in Grays Inn Road, and it seemed to him that this was just the place for his co-operative store. It was built round a central court or square, and colonnaded on the ground floor. He spent £700 out of his diminished fortune in fitting it up—a fact which may be commended to the notice of those who say that he discouraged these practical enterprises—and invited the Socialists of the metropolis to bring their goods to his “National Equitable Labour Exchange.”

It was opened on September 17, 1832, and such was the rush of depositors that it had soon to be closed for

a few days in order to value and dispose of goods. Not only things that you had made—from dough-nuts to slippers or warming-pans—but anything you could get advantageously, might be brought. Tailors, shoemakers, furniture-makers, etc., swarmed to the building, and in time each got a labour-note to the value of his deposit. The capital represented in goods was soon so large that the toll-keepers on the bridges and even the theatres accepted Owen's labour-notes as currency. There were at the time a large number of trade societies, embryonic trade unions, in London serving out material to their members and disposing of the boots, clothes, etc., that they made for them; and they found the Exchange very convenient. It was one of the sights of London. Shop-keepers of the district took alarm, and Owen, with his customary optimism, called them to a meeting and explained that, as their businesses were now doomed, they had better enter the new moral world and find salvation. The day of the middleman was over. A branch was opened in the Rotunda, in Blackfriars Road. The success was extraordinary.

So it ran for a month or two; then the reaction began. Economically, in spite of all the theories of the learned Radicals, it proved sound enough, except on the one point I have mentioned—the rent and fixtures, which ought to have been included in the cost. Owen, we saw, provided the fixtures, and he understood that his friend Bromley benevolently lent them the building, they paying the ground-rent (£320 a year) only. Sagacious critics shake their heads over what they call Owen's usual looseness as to business arrangement. Such laxity would certainly be strange in so successful a business man, but there is no reason to assume it. We know Owen, and we know nothing about Bromley. Owen said that the building was put freely at his disposal; Bromley, when

he saw the brisk stream of business, said that he had meant them to pay £1,400 a year rent from the beginning of 1833! As one does not usually ask a friend and follower to draw up a legal agreement in such a matter, there were no documents. If a wealthy admirer offers an empty house of his to an apostle, the apostle does not demand an agreement in writing that he is to pay no rent. Bromley angrily and hastily closed, and the business was transferred to a building in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, which was to be for many years the headquarters of the Owenites.

The removal incidentally disclosed another weakness. A very large deficit in the stores was discovered, and there is little doubt that there had been heavy thieving. Holyoake, who had in his youth seen many of these early stores, puts it that "there was not a regenerating lunatic at large who did not practise on them." The crank was, perhaps, richer in Owen's movement than in any other reform movement, which is saying much. Employees were largely zealots whose enthusiasm for the cause entitled them to employment. Wives did not care for this prosy sort of shopping. And so on. The Exchange began in 1833 to droop, and the United Trades Association took over the management. It still sank, and its balance-sheet had to be helped by lectures and entertainments. It flickered out before the end of 1834. Almost weekly some little co-operative fire was extinguished in the country. Even the strong National Equitable Labour Exchange at Birmingham died before the end of 1834, though it had the unique distinction of dying solvent. The early Co-operative Movement was over.

One may readily agree that the internal trade of England was never likely to be transferred to this primitive basis of bartering three pairs of boots for a



suit of clothes, or four pounds of jam for a pair of socks. Owen did afterwards say that he was not zealous for the store, and had yielded to impatient friends. No doubt he had to some extent. He never lost sight of his own larger ideal. But the phase was a very useful preparation of tens of thousands of minds for the saner Co-operative Movement which would begin ten years later, and Owen's articles at the time in his various organs show that he appreciated the serious principle. Precisely what we must regard as the weakest part of his Exchange—the failure to include such expenses as rent in the valuation of the commodities—was an attempt to keep the co-operative ideal at its purest, to dispense entirely with the payment of rent on capital as well as the services of the middleman. Our present Co-operative Movement pays enormous sums annually in rent on its huge capital. It turned out that the system would not work unless the consumers made up a certain capital between them, if only in one-pound shares, and paid themselves interest on this capital. Owen had tried to do otherwise.

Some of the causes of failure which have been assigned, and are readily accepted by various critics, come from suspected or tainted sources. During these years Owen lectured much, and he was less reserved about religion. It is said that this alienated many who would otherwise follow or co-operate with him. Any person who cares to investigate the matter will probably find that such charges come largely from men like Lovett, who behaved very badly to Owen and Holyoake. Lovett was a "Christian democrat," and on both grounds opposed Owen. Once, when Owen insisted on his personal view being followed in a matter connected with the Exchange, Lovett strenuously protested against such autocracy. He might very fitly have been reminded

that Owen had not only got the building, but had sacrificed two years' whole income in fitting it up. Lovett presently passed into the Chartist movement, which first tried to include Owen and then made light of him. But we will consider this in the next chapter. Let us not too easily listen to these small-minded critics. It is true that at the end of the six years we have just surveyed Owen seemed to contemplate only a world of ruins. But that is a superficial view. The later Co-operative Movement clearly grew out of the spirit diffused throughout the United Kingdom by Owen in those years; and it is in the Co-operative Movement that his memory is most loyally treasured to-day. We will next see what came of another part of his activity in the thirties.

## IX

### WITH THE EARLY TRADE UNIONS

DURING the period which we have just covered there occurred what many people, with only a superficial knowledge of history, regard as a monumental advance in the political life of England. The "Great Reform Bill" was passed in 1832. Fifty years had been spent in the agitation for this reform, and we saw that Owen was repeatedly blamed for not transferring his enthusiasm and his influence to it. A not very scrupulous biographer could easily make out a triumphant case for Owen. One might plausibly contend that he was far wiser than the Roebucks and Attwoods, who asked the millions to turn away from the Owenite mirage and concentrate on the Reform Bill. It would be necessary only to point out that the Radicals were, before the end of 1833, as furiously opposed to the Government as ever; that they denounced the Reform Bill and the Reformed Parliament as shams; that political life was as corrupt as ever, and legislation for the people as tardy and reluctant as ever. No one, surely, disputes to-day that the Whigs and their ten-pound householders were as bad as the Tories.

But I am not an unscrupulous biographer, and will not pretend that Robert Owen foresaw these things. It is true that in a general way he had no hope of politics and politicians. The aim of the best of the latter was a very slow and gradual betterment of the existing order of things. Owen believed that so radical a change of environment was needed that this was useless. He says :—

When the partisans of political parties fully expected I would unite with them in opposition to some part of the existing order of things, I could not join in their measures, knowing that they saw but a small part of the evil which they fruitlessly, yet often honestly, endeavoured to remove, and consequently erred in the means of attaining their object.

Therefore we have found in the last chapter no reflection whatever of the mighty agitation for the Reform Bill which filled England in 1831 and 1832. The country was, in fact, not far removed from civil war. The King was pelted on the streets, and was addressed in the Radical papers of London in terms which would make a modern drayman blush. Hundreds of thousands of working men made pikes or other arms, and talked of war. Bishops were hounded into their palaces, and cathedrals menaced. Public buildings were set aflame.

Owen had so small a share in these things that he was accused of being in collusion with the Government! It is an unhappy feature of idealist movements that the proud possessor of a moral sentiment is too apt to think his fellow quite immoral. Few instances of this are more ironical than the suggestion that Robert Owen, who had spent a fortune and a life in the service of his poorer fellows, was secretly helping a corrupt Government by endeavouring to distract the masses from political reform. The powerful National Political Union of Birmingham tried to enlist his interest. The early Chartists urged him to take up political reform. He declined to change his work, and, whether he in any degree foresaw it or no, the bitter disillusion after 1832 justified him.

Those who do not quite understand how Owen thought he could get anything done at all *without* political action must try to realize that ninety years ago the machinery

of State was far more simple than it now is. It professed to do little more than safeguard national defence and attend to foreign and colonial affairs. Education it refused to regard as its duty. Industry was left almost entirely to the beneficent providence of *Laissez-faire*. The Home Office did little more than administer a set of abominable poor laws, blasphemy laws, and penal laws. How would the addition of half a million voters to the register help what Owen regarded as the hope of England? It is, in fact, probable enough that he knew that half the people who were clamouring for the vote looked to its corrupt financial value—from five to fifty guineas—and that the Whigs, who were their champions, were only working for, as Daniel O'Connell said, a long lease of Downing Street.

In the bitter shadow of their disillusion the workers then turned to what is now known as "direct action"—trade organization and the strike. Trade Unionism struggled heroically for the right to existence, and employers and Government sought just as zealously to strangle it in its cradle. This was a reform more in line with Owen's work, and he now joined the workers, and for a time obtained an enormous influence among them. The critical biographers who up to this time accuse him of aristocratic aloofness from popular movements now say that he set out to capture the Trade Unions. In point of fact, he did for a time lead them.

Owenites were particularly numerous and strong in the new cities of Manchester and Birmingham, especially the latter. The Registrar of Birmingham, William Pare, was one of Owen's ablest supporters. The teachers in the Mechanics' Institute were largely Owenites (as elsewhere). The workers who now began to champion their own cause were to a great extent Owenites, pupils of Owenite schools, or members of Co-operative Societies.

They urged their fellows to invite Owen to address them, and they then wrote to beg Owen to comply. It was a year of terrible and persistent strikes, and Owen wanted neither industrial nor international strife.

So we find him addressing a large audience at Manchester on November 25, 1833. Oastler, Sadler, and other northern friends of the workers were agitating, in the teeth of Radicals as well as Whigs and Tories, for a ten-hour day. Owen declared that the demand was too mean. He started the agitation for an eight-hour day, and, although his movement was premature, it was sound and useful. 'Sixty hours' manual work a week—there was no Saturday half-holiday at that time—unfitted the majority of men for cultivation of either mind or character. He formed a Society for Promoting National Regeneration, which was to secure an eight-hour day without reduction of wages. Fielden and other reformers lent their names to it. Branches were established in London, Sheffield, Bradford, Birmingham, and other large towns. Owen went from city to city lecturing for it. It died of impracticability, like so many of his schemes; but it served a useful purpose in impressing on large bodies of workers that the aim of shorter hours was "national regeneration," by improvement of individual character.

About the same time he appeared among the workers of Birmingham. The great strike of 1833 was that of the builders, and Owen advised them, in the summer, to adopt a scheme not unlike what is now known as Guild Socialism. They were to make their own bricks, arrange with the Colliers' Union for coal, set up co-operative stores for food, and build themselves. At Birmingham Owen's followers were strong enough to carry this plan. A Grand National Guild of Builders was formed. Owen suggested that they ought to build

a Guild Hall for themselves, and for once there was a solid outcome of his schemes. It was not palatial, but for a working-class possession in those days it seemed epoch-making. And every worker connected it with Robert Owen. The Birmingham Owenites issued a penny weekly, *The Pioneer*, which was much read in the workshops.

Towards the close of the year Owen went further. He announced at the Sixth Co-operative Congress, which was held in London, that they would have a "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland." There were to be parochial associations or Lodges—branches one would now say—for each trade. These would send delegates to the County Lodges, and from these in turn would be chosen the members of the Grand National Council. It was founded early in 1834, and in a few weeks it had more than half a million members!

One sees now how foolish it is to represent Owen at this period as a spent force, or an undemocratic spinner of plans for the distraction of the workers. His new organization was ideally democratic, and the extraordinary success is sufficient answer to those who would depict him as an amiable and futile dreamer. The people were being educated, in spite of Church and Government. Even hundreds of thousands of them who could not read were in a very real sense educated by the struggles of the preceding six years. Demos was not quite the same person as he had been in Owen's younger days. A smart lad in any large town could get education at a Mechanics' Institute or Owenite school, or some such place. Just at that time George Jacob Holyoake, son of an iron-worker, was in Birmingham completing the foundations of his very respectable and attractive culture.

How precisely Owen, who must for once have been surprised at his own success, was going to bring this movement into his general scheme of idealism is not clear. He found himself quite suddenly at the head of a larger movement than he can have imagined. He flitted from city to city, and addressed thousands. But he was not left long enough in his new position to think out his philosophy very clearly.

The country was terrified by his latest creation. The Grand Union had, of course, grown so rapidly because thousands of little trade societies or unions as well as some large Unions already existed, ready to be incorporated. They were generally modelled on the Lodges of the Freemasons, and were therefore, locally, secret societies with mystic and foolish rites of initiation. A candidate would be blindfolded, and led into an inner room, with impressive pass-words. When the bandage was removed, he might find himself facing a skeleton or some ghastly picture representing death, while men stood round him with axes and swords. He would be compelled to take sonorous oaths of secrecy, and he would be quite a romantic figure in the workshop or the district afterwards. Naturally, Owen did not design any folly of this kind for his lodges, but it already existed, and it continued. At the time when Parliament had blocked the Reform Bill, the workers had openly used language which was more than seditious. Their orators had publicly used the most violent language, especially against the King, the bishops, and statesmen. Privately these secret lodges had discussed bombs and assassinations.

The Government seized on this side of the movement for its undoing. Six labourers who had been through the more melodramatic rites of initiation were arrested and tried. The horrid details made the flesh of England creep. This was, naturally, what the Government



wanted, and, after quite brutal sentences had been passed on the six labourers, a sort of inquisition was instituted, and the heaviest weapons in the penal arsenal were directed against the Unions. In London the Grand National organized a procession of 30,000 workers to demand a reduction of the sentences. Owen marched through the streets with them to the Home Office, but Lord Melbourne, who was otherwise not unfriendly to Owen, refused to see them. He equally rejected a petition which Owen later forwarded to him. It was a case for the "firm hand." The employers were dealing harshly in the country with Unionists, who were, of course, a minority of the workers, and the Government was able to use its power.

So within six months the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was shattered. The record is very incomplete just here, and the final result is not very intelligible. We are told that the delegates to the Council met in London in August (1834), and that Owen presided. They decided that the proceedings which had been disclosed had created irremovable prejudice against the Grand National, and the name was changed to "The British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity, and Knowledge." Any person can recognize in this phrase Owen's remarkable fluency in inventing sonorous titles; and we further recognize his counsel in the decision to work for harmonious relations between masters and employees, and to try to obtain a charter. Yet from this point onward he appears little in the Trade Union world. There are, in fact, some indications of hostility to him. It may be that the counsels of moderation that he obviously carried at the conference were used by violent men for the purpose of discrediting him. He was not "thorough" enough. He "truckled" to the ruling class. The language is quite familiar

in our own time. Lovett and the "Christian democrats" would not be slow to talk. From Lovett's language one may reasonably infer that he urged the imprudence of their being represented by so drastic a heretic as Owen.

On the whole, it seems likely that Owen saw the impossibility of leading the entire movement into paths of peace, and voluntarily quitted it. One can quite understand the sullenness with which many of them would receive the advice to make peace with the masters and the Government at such a time. The Government acted brutally, and it plainly conspired with the masters to crush the attempt at combination itself. The theatrical initiations and daggers and skulls were only a pretext. When Owen, on the other hand, could get no reduction of the sentences, he found himself in an impossible position. Trade Unionism had to pass through another critical period, the period of Chartism, before it would be solidly established.

Chartism was the next stage, and Owen, as I said, refused to co-operate with it. Not only did it generally comprise the more violent of the Unionists—as late as 1838 Holyoake was initiated in a Lodge which whispered of assassination—but it had a purely political aim. The six points of the Charter, framed in 1838, were manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, the ballot, payment of members of Parliament, abolition of the property qualification for members, and equality of electoral districts. We have already seen why Owen would not join in political agitation. Many to-day will agree with him, no doubt, that the world must be changed before the political system; not the other way about.

One might truthfully add that the Chartists also expected him to be silent about religion if he co-operated with them. Hardly one of their leaders was an orthodox Christian, but they considered it imprudent to

attack religion. Bronterre O'Brien, one of the most cultivated and powerful leaders, was nominally a Roman Catholic. He wrote privately to Owen that their opinions on religion differed little or not at all, but he asked Owen to abandon that irritating discussion and join them. Owen would not, in any case, compromise; but other reasons kept him away from Chartism. His followers were numerous in the movement, and he never attempted to withdraw them. But political reform would not, in his opinion, regenerate England. In the course of time (1842) he issued an "Address to the Chartists," stating this belief.

Owen fell back upon his characteristic general movement. We may, however, surely add that he had done his share on the democratic side, in the narrower sense. To have organized a body of half a million workers in a month or two, to have gone beyond almost any other reformer and organized a movement in favour of an eight hour day, to have fought strenuously for the right of combination when all the employers of Britain were leagued to crush it, to have persistently protested against the harsh usage of the pioneers of unionism, are services the workers may gratefully remember. They complete his splendid record on the industrial side.

## X

### THE NEW MORAL WORLD

OWEN, it is well to recall, had now passed his sixtieth year. He had never been a robust man, and it was only by strict sobriety and prudence of life that he had kept himself fitted for the constant and severe strain since 1816. It is remarkable that he had, even for a time, an influence over large bodies of men in the industrial movement. His speeches were clear and persuasive, but monotonous even to dullness, very lengthy, full of repetitions, devoid of fire or humour or eloquence. It was by sheer force of character and achievements that he impressed these great crowds of workers; and it is not a little to their credit that they showed him the respect they did, accustomed as they now were to violent and sonorous orators like Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones. But Owen's sphere was really the world of thoughtful middle-class men and educated workers, and to this he now restricted his attention.

He expressed it himself that an "awful crisis" had passed, and he was free to resume his proper work in life. He therefore changed the name of his paper (in 1834) from *The Crisis* to *The New Moral World*. The new journal opened at once with the flaring announcement: "The rubicon between the old Immoral and the new Moral World is passed.....the sword of Truth and Moral Good is now unsheathed." No one else was particularly sensible of having crossed a rubicon in 1834, nor did it seem to others that Owen's "sword of Truth

and Moral Goodness" had remained in its scabbard until that year. Possibly there were many of his followers who had not liked his recent excursions into what they might call politics, and he thus finally announced his return to concentrated work on his general moral idealism. I protest once more against the fashion of calling it an "abstract principle." It was a concrete and most comprehensive moral ideal, and it essentially implied a series of most drastic material and industrial changes. The writers who smile at Owen's insistence on the maxim that "man's character is made for him and not by him" constantly forget that Owen always meant by this a colossal programme of housing, education, sanitation, temperance reform, industrial reform, and religious reform. To the last year of his active life he wrought for this vast national transformation. It would, in fact, be more intelligible if critics accused him of being too "materialistic" instead of harping on his "abstract moral principle." He had no abstract principles. The moral reform he sought was to be the consequence of a comprehensive material reform, accompanied by a finer scheme of education than then existed in Europe.

It is singular that no social student has ever closely studied the relations between Owen's ideal and that which Karl Marx would presently spread over a great part of Europe. The inquiry would be very attractive, but it is obviously impossible to follow up such speculations in a small work like this. I will be content to point out that, just as the Owenites were called Socialists long before Marx and Lassalle began their careers, so there is a considerable similarity in some important aspects of their doctrines. Owen's theory of labour as the sole factor determining the value of commodities—the value of the raw material even is ultimately a

question of labour—might well be studied in connection with Marx's more developed theory of surplus-value. But the chief analogy is in regard to what is called Marx's materialism, or the doctrine that economic causes determine all events. We saw how very strongly Owen insisted in America that man can investigate *only* material laws, and his moral reform consisted plainly of a series of material transformations. Marx, of course, insisted on education as much as Owen did. The differences between them are largely verbal, and a closer study would be interesting, but cannot be pursued here.

What Owen now discovered, however, was that to a certain degree moral influence must precede material changes. His work for twenty years had been frustrated by men of base or imperfect character. At the best he was forced to conclude that his work lagged because there were not sufficient men and women of high and generous character in England to assist him in realizing his material ideal. The immediate task was to create these, by persuasion or education, and Owen's last phase is, therefore, the creation of what we should now call an ethical movement. It is quite a mistake to say, as some do, that in this last phase he disdained such things as industrial movements and trade exchanges. We shall see that he sustains his interest in these things. But he chiefly concerns himself with the creation of a religious movement, strictly humanitarian or non-theological in character, with the practical aim always of inspiring men to better the world about them; and we shall see that here again this man, who is so often described as admirable in principles but a failure in practice, organized a far more powerful movement than is possible even in our day, with double the population and treble the propagandist resources.

Among the numerous societies which sprang up under

his influence in the early thirties was one entitled "The Moral Union of the Friends of the Rational System of Society." This pointed the way to the next phase. There was to be, Owen said, "a great moral revolution of the human mind, directed solely by truth, by charity, and by kindness." Political reform would follow this, he said. At present it would be useless to substitute one body of men for another in the control of our institutions, seeing that there was no apparent difference of character. He called a general meeting at the institute in Charlotte Street, and announced a formation of an "Association of All Classes of All Nations, formed to effect an entire change in the character and condition of the human race." This was what he had advocated since 1813. In view of the ferment of movements about him he now stresses the moral element and the ideal of harmonious co-operation of all classes and all nations. He loathed every kind of violence and warfare. He must have suggested that the head of the Association should be called "Father," as we find him accepting, under pressure, the title of "Preliminary Father." He said, however, that he intended to retire from public work on his sixty-fifth birthday, May 14, 1836, and devote himself to writing.

Many indications show that he had not, as Sargant suggests, lost himself in a sterile sort of mysticism. We find that he was in this year (1835) appointed to a committee, mainly consisting of Members of Parliament, for investigating the causes of unemployment. In the same year he published a work, *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World*, which brought upon him even more odium than his condemnation of religion: perhaps it would be correct to say that this book gave a pretext to his religious critics, who had not hitherto been able to convince people that their

principles were more inspiring than those of Robert Owen. Up to this time not a single clergyman had taken a prominent part in the various movements to help the people of England.

By "marriages of the priesthood" Owen meant, of course, the marriages celebrated by clergymen, and he had very little trouble in showing that the indissoluble marriages they were responsible for produced a great volume of vice and misery. One could show that only too well to-day, and it was far worse in 1835, when divorce could be obtained only by a special Act of Parliament in each case, which restricted relief from an unhappy marriage to the wealthy and influential few. For the vast majority there was no relief, and, as ideas were still far looser than they are to-day, the consequences may easily be imagined. Owen denounced the system in just and measured terms. Here and there, moreover, he seemed to go further and contend that marriage would always produce evil results; and his enemies at once exultantly cried that unbelief had at last disclosed its inevitable germs of immorality.

Holyoake replied, long ago, that the book does not contain Owen's words. It was not written by him, but consists of *reports* of lectures that he gave on marriage. Holyoake says, in fact, that Owen repudiated the report of his sentiments. Probably the best thing to do is to take the substance of the passages in this book and compare it with Owen's utterances on marriage in the course of his debate with Campbell at Cincinnati. We then see that he certainly believed in marriage, in properly attested and authorized unions of the sexes, under secular officials. This does not startle us, because we see it daily in our registry offices; and we must remember that the Church of England still clung to its monopoly in 1835. But Owen at the same time



pleaded for a very liberal measure of divorce, and it was this which led to vituperation. We should say to-day that Owen merely proved himself once more one of the greatest pioneers of social reform in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The "Preliminary Father," though now an old man of sixty-four, entered upon a period of activity which is almost incredible. His lectures, as we trace them in his periodical, were incessant, and took him all over the country; and we must not forget the conditions of travelling in those days. Sometimes he lectured every night in the week, travelling day after day to a new district. The Association genially ignored his pretence of retiring at sixty-five and gave him a permanent title. He became the "Rational Social Father" of the new body. It sounds to us an unpleasant mixture of the patriarchal and the pontifical, but it was a more sentimental age than ours is. Manchester now became the centre of the movement, and Mr. G. A. Fleming was appointed secretary of the Central Board and editor of the paper. The object was re-affirmed to be "an entire change in the character and condition of mankind," and it was stated that this was to be done by lectures, tracts, societies, mutual exchanges, etc. This express mention of "mutual exchanges" must not be forgotten. At the same time Owen founded a "National Community Friendly Society," another piece of pioneer work. One of its objects was to enable members to build or buy houses.

In 1837 Owen made another visit to the continent, not for pleasure, but to further the work of uniting "All Classes of All Nations." He was still on very good terms, not only with English politicians like Lord Brougham and Lord Melbourne, but with most of the foreign ambassadors. Prince Esterhazy, the Austrian

ambassador, gave him a letter of introduction to Prince Metternich, then, perhaps, the most powerful statesman in Europe. He stayed some time in Paris, where he was received with all the old distinction. He lectured, through an interpreter, in the Hôtel de Ville, and received diplomas from various learned societies. From there he made the long coach journey to Munich, to see Ludwig I of Bavaria, who welcomed him. Then he saw Metternich at Vienna; and no doubt he was amicably fooled by that astute and reactionary prince. We may assume that Owen, who did not know a word of German or Italian or French, was quite ignorant of the brutality with which Metternich enforced the rule of the Hapsburgs. He visited also Dresden and Berlin, scattering his seed of idealism on all the stony soil of the Continent.

At the 1837 Congress of the Association it was decided to appoint missionaries of the new religion. Early in 1838 Lloyd Jones, Rigby, Hollick, Campbell, Green, and Buchanan were appointed, and were located in the larger cities. The Central Board was transferred to Birmingham, where a certain young iron-worker, George Jacob Holyoake, was now converted to Owenism and tremulously aspired to become an apostle of it. From year to year the movement grew, and plans of forming a model community again periodically appeared and disappeared. All Owen's optimism returned. He had at last found the right way, he thought. Francis Place says that Owen told him that the world would be revolutionized within six months.

Certainly the growth of the Rational Religion, as it came to be named, or of the Socialists, as they were popularly called, was very remarkable. We might indicate as the proper heirs and successors of this last organization of Owen's the group of movements now

known as Secularists, Rationalists, and Ethicists. These, collectively, probably do not count more than 10,000 members; and the facilities for organizing and holding meetings, and propaganda purposes generally, are now far superior to what they were in 1840. Yet in 1840 Owen's movement had sixty-two branches, and its Sunday services were attended by about 50,000 persons every week. In another few years it would count a membership of one hundred thousand. In 1839 it sold no less than half a million tracts, and the number grew yearly.

Many of the branches were, as we learn from Holyoake's humorous accounts of his early experiences, very humble gatherings in very humble structures, such as a little room over a carpenter's shop. But in the cities the support of the movement was very substantial. As public and clerical hostility grew, it became difficult to hire halls, and the Rational Religionists decided to build their own sanctuaries. On these Halls of Science or Social Institutions, as they were indifferently called, the movement spent no less than £22,000 in the year 1840. Manchester built a Hall at the cost of £6,000—a good figure in those days. The Liverpool building cost £5,000. London, Sheffield, and other cities had their Halls of Science, at which a most useful educational work was done in an age when education was still grossly neglected by the State.

The Owenite services were similar to those one witnesses in Ethical Societies and (with little alteration) Labour Churches to-day. A few humanitarian poems or songs were set to hymn tunes and distributed through the service. Then there was a reading from some humanitarian writer. The chief item was the address or discourse. One of Mr. Podmore's strangest strictures is found where he discusses these services. He quotes

several of the hymns, and is quite unjust in his comments on them. Of the ideal patriot, for instance, the Owenites sang:—

Not he who, calling that land's might his pride,  
Trampleth the rights of all the earth beside.  
No! He it is, the just, the gen'rous soul,  
Who owneth brotherhood with either pole,  
Stretches from realm to realm his spacious mind,  
And guards the weal of all the human kind;  
Holds freedom's banner o'er the earth unfurled,  
And stands the Guardian Patriot of the World.

Because this is preceded by a hopeful reference to Villages of Union Mr. Podmore disdainfully speaks of it as "a picture, drawn by themselves, of Socialist ideals and aspirations." He hints that they look forward to spending their lives in Epicurean oases of placid comfort, sheltered from the horrors of the desert of the old immoral world. The later lines of the hymn, which I have quoted, show that this is an entire misconception; and Mr. Podmore, of all men, ought to have known that the Owenites did not want comfortable oases for themselves in the desert, but wanted the whole desert transformed for *all* into a garden. He further betrays how far he has listened to Owen's critics by stating that there is no mention in the Owenite hymns of justice! It is, surely, the strangest criticism ever made against the Owenites that they failed to speak of justice. A verse of one of the hymns quoted by Mr. Podmore runs:—

Outcasts of your native soil,  
Doomed to poverty and toil,  
Strangers in your native land,  
Come and join the social band.

If the first three lines of this verse are not steeped in the sentiment of justice, I do not know what justice is. As to the literary quality of the hymns, it must be judged by the hymns of 1840, not of 1910. A glance at

the religious hymn-books then in use discovers a strange world of phrases and sentiments. The Owenite *Social Hymns* were far superior to most.

In view of the progress of his movement, Owen began again to use hyperbolic language. He penned an address to the King, William IV, in which he acutely analysed the causes of the prevailing distress and brought a heavy indictment against the existing social and industrial system. Mr. Podmore admits that this is "a striking passage." It must seem so to any man who insists upon regarding Owen as a dreamy mystic. The King died soon afterwards, and Queen Victoria nervously mounted the throne. Owen, we remember, had been a friend of her father for ten years. Indeed, one is almost tempted to say that the Duke of Kent had been one of the first Owenites. He certainly had a profound regard for Owen and his general principles. Probably Owen trusted that the daughter had inherited a little of the Duke's spirit, for he asked Lord Melbourne to introduce him to the Queen. He was presented on June 26, 1839, and he offered an address to the Queen in the name of his followers.

This reception, publicly announced in the London press, brought to a head the growing hostility against the Rational Religionists. A holy war against them was inaugurated in the House of Lords by the Bishop of Exeter, Philpotts—"that obscene renegade Philpotts" the popular London Press had called him not many years before for his hostility to the rights of the people. Philpotts curdled the blood of his brother bishops and peers with his account of the national peril. Here was a movement which actually dared to teach religion in a "rational" form, and presented a summary of its blasphemies and immoralities to the innocent and virginal young Queen! It had divided the kingdom into a kind of

bishoprics, their boundaries as minutely defined as on an ordnance map, and from the cities ten men (of the formidable and devastating type of Lloyd Jones and G. J. Holyoake) disseminated their poison over these dioceses. The Bishop did not add that these Owenite pastors differed from himself and his colleagues in having salaries of only £50 to £100 a year, and that their apostolic wanderings were done mainly afoot from lack of coach fare. But he eloquently descanted on Owen's supposed vile views in regard to marriage, and he severely denounced the authorities for allowing them to hold rival services to the Churches on Sundays.

Most people in London laughed at this ridiculously misplaced zeal. The fault that the bulk of thoughtful people found with the Owenites was that they were *too* moral and too little practical. To us, who have now seen how Owen's ideal was at once practical and profoundly moral, the spectacle of a bishop trying to check its influence in England is an intolerable absurdity. It is the quintessence of sectarian rancour, especially when we remember that for forty years the bishops themselves had been one of the chief obstacles to education and nearly every other reform.

But in a curious indirect way the campaign against the Owenites, which now proceeded in full blast, led to the end of the movement. The direct assault did little. Here and there a martyr was made—Pare, for instance, was compelled to abandon his civic office at Birmingham—and a monstrous type of apologist for holiness named Brindley conducted a raging, foul-mouthed campaign in the towns. In places he stirred mobs against the innocent Owenites, or got public halls closed against them. Some one, however, then discovered that the Owenites charged for admission on Sundays, and an ancient Act of Parliament which forbade this was disinterred.

The charge for admission, I gather from Holyoake's writings, was only one penny—certainly in many places—and, if the new assault had been wisely met, the loss of a penny here and there would easily have been compensated by the shillings of the faithful. Unhappily, the Central Board of the Rational Religion adopted a false policy, and the movement was rent in twain. In January 1840 it had aroused a panic in the Churches, and been gravely discussed in both Houses of Parliament. The "clergy, magistrates, and tradesmen of Birmingham" had solemnly petitioned the Government to take action against it. Before the end of the year it was split into two hostile parties and rapidly disintegrated.

Holyoake tells the story in his inimitable way. A Manchester clergyman formally laid information against them that, contrary to Act 39, George III, c. 79, they had charged money for entrance to their meetings. It was a rancorous and scandalous proceeding, because the Act was expressly intended to check sedition, and it made such a meeting place "a disorderly house." The Socialists retorted that there was an Act of 1817, in relief of Dissenters, excluding the former Act from application to places of worship; and they went on to take the fatal step of calling themselves "Protestant Dissenters," and claiming that they met for the purpose of "worship." I cannot find any indication whatever of Owen's attitude at this crisis. The younger and more vigorous men of the Central Board and *The New Moral World* seem to have controlled the situation. Any person who cares may learn from the columns of *The New Moral World* the sophistry by which they persuaded themselves that they really were "Protestant Dissenters." They recommended the missionaries in charge of the various Halls of Science to take this attitude.

The clerical enemy called upon the various mission-

aries to swear on oath that they were Christians and accepted the Scriptures as "the revealed word of God." Buchanan, of Manchester, at once complied. He seems to have had an elastic conscience. Lloyd Jones, who appears not to have been as heretical as Owen, since he afterwards became a very prominent Christian Socialist (though he was never an orthodox Christian), hesitated for some time, and at last took the oath. The younger men thought this a scandalous piece of hypocrisy, and clung to Owen's true gospel: No Compromise.

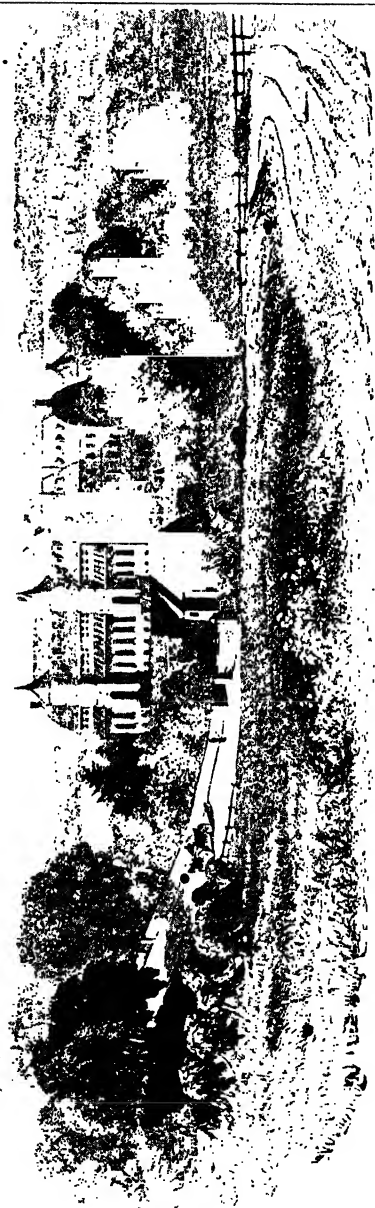
It must be understood that other developments at the time were accentuating the anti-clerical element of the Owenite movement. Owen himself, though he habitually deprecated religious discussion, was very outspoken in some of his lectures and writings. He was drawn into a debate with Brindley in 1841, and the brutality and coarseness of his reverend opponent astonished him. The blasphemy laws were being applied vigorously, and some sentences which we now regard as quite savage were inflicted. The well-known experience of Holyoake at Cheltenham and Gloucester will remind any person of the grossness of orthodox despotism at that time. Hence Paterson, Southwell, and other missionaries very frequently made their Owenite discourses consist of the most resonant and blood-curdling denunciations of religion. All over the kingdom the Churches were, in literal fact at the moment, their enemies; and very unscrupulous enemies. Southwell and Paterson had been actors of melodrama (and adventurers generally), and they could give and take with clerical bullies like Brindley quite cheerfully. When the heads of the movement recommended these men to submit meekly to clerical opposition, and swear that they accepted the Scriptures (which they had been ridiculing in lurid language from Bristol to Edinburgh) reverently as the



word of God, the cauldron boiled over. Buchanan they called "the Reverend Swear-at-Once," and Lloyd Jones "the Reverend Swear-at-Last." For themselves, they redoubled the violence of their language about religion, and one by one they passed into the shadow of the jails. Even the gentle and refined young Holyoake, the true successor of Owen, was rapidly driven to Agnosticism, and had to endure a gross travesty of trial and a brutal imprisonment, for saying things that might to-day be heard from a pulpit. The movement laboured heavily in these stormy waters.

The last blow came from an event which had at first seemed to be the culmination of all their hopes. In 1839 the long-deferred plan of a model community had passed at length into the practical sphere. The Society had purchased 533 acres of ground at Tytherly, in Hampshire, with a large farm known as Queenwood. For this they paid a premium of £750, and they were to pay an annual rental of £350. Owen was appointed Governor, but he wisely resigned without taking any steps, saying that in his opinion "the branches and the more influential members of them are not yet prepared either with funds or experience for more than a preliminary Working Community adapted to the views and habits of the better conditioned of the working classes, and that the members of the various branches are too impatient to wait for the necessary accumulation of funds to commence a community, according to my ideas of a community calculated for the general population of a country." He recommended that certain members, named by him, should be appointed to manage the place under the control of the Central Board.

Funds were provided from the treasury of the Society and by subscriptions from the branches. A new wave of enthusiasm rippled over the Owenite world, and gifts





of every description were showered upon the cradle of the new moral world. A hopeful band—far richer, as usual, in enthusiasm than in mere technical skill at anything—went down to Hampshire and inaugurated the model life at Queenwood. Bishops fumed and fretted once more. These Socialists had now, said one zealous organ of the godly, set up “an Epicurean sty, on a large scale, in Hampshire.” Hampshire was summoned to cleanse its soil of “so hideous a pollution.”

Meantime the Epicurean sty was not the luxurious “abode of love” that the country was given to understand. There were too many members for the accommodation, too few for the skilled work. Branches of the movement which had contributed generously had claimed also to contribute members; and enthusiastic Rational Religionists from Leeds and Sheffield were not necessarily good farmers, it was found. In 1840 the members had to be reduced from fifty-seven to nineteen—certainly a most worthy subject for the bishops to discuss in the House of Lords. The balance-sheet was still ominous, and Robert Owen was requested to accept the position of Governor.

Owen was now seventy years old, and I will tell the issue briefly. Relying on the enthusiasm of his middle-class disciples, and on his own calculations of cost and product as if he were still only forty years old, he set about erecting a mansion which should worthily present his ideal community to the world. A very handsome building, Harmony Hall, was erected, and no expense was spared in decorating and furnishing it. More land was purchased. Nearly £20,000 was spent on the property. The Board took alarm, and practically compelled Owen to resign. He had, they said, unduly relied on an expectation of outside capital. New managers were appointed. A boarding school was announced.

Glowing descriptions were circulated. In 1843 Owen again became Governor, and hope revived. But all this was done at the expense of other branches of the Society's work. The missionaries were discharged (that is to say, thrown upon the coffers of the local societies or the hospitality of Her Majesty's Prison Commissioners), and every pound was sent to Queenwood. The branches murmured, Owen's "autocracy" was openly questioned, and he resigned. A new schism was added to the schism about religion. No one could make the expensive structure pay, and in the summer of 1845 its affairs were wound up. In the following year the main structure became Queenwood College.

With the disappearance of Queenwood, and the almost simultaneous disappearance of *The New Moral World*, the terror so eloquently depicted by Bishop Philpotts was lifted from the breast of England. The movement broke into a dozen fragments, many of which immediately crumbled. Holyoake and his friends of the more Rationalistic group evolved steadily towards Secularism and Rationalism. Lloyd Jones and his friends travelled towards the Christian Socialism which Kingsley would presently create for the more effective protection of the Church. The great mass of the members were absorbed in the various political, educational, and economic movements of the time. To call this period of Owen's life sterile is quite unjust. In the calendar of every reform movement after 1845 you find the names of Owen's disciples. All over the country were thousands of men into whom he had infused his broad and noble spirit; and any man who works in our modern movements will find that spirit of Robert Owen alive and effective to-day in the second, and even third, generation.

## XI

### LAST YEARS

THERE were, probably, few phases in the long and eventful career of Owen which must have tried his philosophic temper more than the way in which his last great work in England came to an end. Not only did the final hope of the realization of his life-long ideal fail, but it failed in circumstances of peculiar pain to himself. He had appealed to the people. He had asked that his temple of human happiness, his splendid model or prototype of what society ought to be, should be erected by the shillings of the workers, who would most profit by it, as well as the guineas of the middle class. They had responded not ungenerously when we consider that an artisan's wage in England was then a miserable pittance. It is true that the main assistance had still come from the middle class. One devoted follower, by no means wealthy, had invested £12,000 in Harmony Hall and the colony. These men generally remained with Owen and shared his grief in silence.

But Owen had now to see that when one builds with the shillings of poor workers one must take infinite thought for their small and laborious sparings. There is no doubt whatever that he had been imprudent. All that one can do is to show that he had motives which not only leave his high character unstained, but forbid us even to think that his intellect was in decay. He had not at all relied on the savings of the workers, the contributions of the branches of the Rational Religion. He was a business man of proved ability. He was

offering to the more benevolently disposed of the wealthy an investment which promised—and there were experts who endorsed this estimate—a fair return. This “outside capital,” as the officials of the movement called it, was not provided. Owen and his followers believed that industrial reorganization on a just and humane basis would mean so much more production and profit that it would pay to house his colonists handsomely. It was a very widespread belief of the time, and is a very widespread belief in the Socialist world of our own time, that the existing industrial system leaks at every joint and suffers an enormous waste of values. On that principle he proceeded, and those who contributed agreed with him. But when the balance-sheets disclosed periodical deficits, when it became clear that Queenwood had not the slightest chance of success, there were sullen murmurs of extravagance. Large numbers of his poorer followers, men who had no memory of his long struggle on their behalf, murmured and rebelled. It was with these murmurs in his ears, with a consciousness that his seventy-fifth year had passed yet his plan seemed farther than ever from realization, that he took ship, in the autumn of 1844, and joined his sons in America.

Owen's biographer has, in regard to the second half of his life (which he himself never recorded), a tantalizing task. We see little more than his work. His personality eludes us. We would give much for an account by some fellow-passenger on his ship telling how the aged reformer bore his deep disappointment; how his placid and lofty ideal of life stood the strain of those terrible two years. But we have nothing except dry dates and movements. Another American reformer, Adin Ballou, who met him about this time, fancies that he is giving us a pen-picture of Owen. He was “in hope a terrestrial elysianist; in practical business a methodist; in deportment an

unequivocal gentleman," and so on. But this is merely a specimen of the verbal gymnastics or conjuring which some American writers mistake for art.

What we do know, however, surprises us. We should surely expect the white-haired and always frail friend of the people to retire into his autumnal rest, if not quit the planet with a broken heart, after what seemed to be this violent and dishonouring close of the volume of his public work. We find precisely the opposite, and we may infer from the spirited work we have yet to chronicle that even in this darkest hour of his life Owen continued to bear splendid witness to the personal, as well as the social, inspiration of his ideal.

In America he did not drowse away his days at New Harmony, where Robert Dale still sought to salvage the wreck of his work. The son, we saw in an earlier chapter, found his father again almost penniless. Whatever imprudence we may charge against him in connection with Queenwood, let us not forget that there was no thought of prudence in his own material concerns. For twenty years his sons had had to see that he retained some sort of home and a modest maintenance. He had emptied his pockets on behalf of his fellows once more, and he faced old age in tranquil poverty. Robert Dale and his brother make it clear that he did not fly to them for money. He had gone to America to preach his gospel once more, and, I infer, to live by his gospel, as good preachers ought. He stayed little at the farm in Indiana, but travelled from city to city, lecturing much and comparing ideas of human betterment with the social reformers who now sprang up on every side in America. But his sons, with pious fraud, saw to his wants. They concocted a statement of accounts which proved that they owed their father £6,000, and they paid him six per cent. on this for the rest of his life.



In 1846 he returned to England on an errand of mercy. There was not merely strong feeling but acute and dangerous hostility between the two nations over a question of the defining of the northern frontier. War was on the lips of many, and men were still so close to the memory of the War of Independence and the later war that the rumour was greeted with savage joy by some. On both sides there was, in the horrid phrase that makes white-hot the lingering passions of savagery in man, "something to wipe off the slate." Robert Dale Owen, now a member of Congress, did what he could for peace in America, while fully sustaining the American claim. He asked his father to work for peace in London, and Owen was soon back at Westminster. But it was a new generation of statesmen, who knew Owen only as the butt of violent pulpit oratory and the broken promoter of Queenwood. He saw Lord Aberdeen, who was courteous and unconvinced, and he wrote to the Premier, Sir Robert Peel, who rather shabbily repelled him. The result, however, was a compromise, and Owen's information about American sentiment may have helped to bend the Government to this.

Later in the year he took up again the question of Ireland. England was in its "hungry forties." Ireland was in the black famine-days which have scattered its children over the face of the earth. To this the "Great" Reform Bill and the Reform Legislation had brought the kingdom. Owen went over to Ireland to study the situation, and he had a long interview with the Earl of Clarendon, the Lord Lieutenant. We conclude that his ideas were, as was customary in the political world, "taken into consideration." They were certainly not put into practice.

The year 1848 brought the third French Revolution, the third volcanic outburst of the fiery sentiments which

feudal monarchs kept imprisoned below the soil of Europe. They had, after wondering for a year or two if it was not possible and prudent to do something, rejected Owen's appeal for paternal benevolence, and had relied upon Metternich's policy of paternal truculence. The soil of nearly every country in Europe was red with the blood of good men. We are apt to forget to-day that England itself, the supposed home of free institutions, had shared the tyranny of that awful period from 1817 to 1847. Men of high ideals went mad, or committed suicide, in our jails. Men who would now be aggrandized in our Press as "leaders of labour" were sent to cut gum-trees with thieves in Botany Bay. Our courts visited with something like savagery every attempt to secure freedom of speech and discussion and combination.

The French part of the revolutionary movement of 1848—the initial outbreak, for the French were, as ever, the heralds and pioneers of the human struggle—particularly interested Owen, because it was followed, as is well known, by a remarkable experiment in what Owen called co-operation. National workshops for the unemployed, with generous wages, were opened at Paris. Owen's slowing heart was stirred by a last flush of hope. Here was a nation moving in the direction of his ideal, setting at defiance the *Laissez-faire* principle of the English economists. Our economists and historians have had their revenge on those unfortunate workshops of 1848, but this is no place to discuss them. Owen went to Paris to push the development more and more in the direction of his plan.

He saw Louis Blanc, and the Mayor of Paris, and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. In June he was invited to address the Labour Committee of the Government; and he wrote addresses to the National Assembly, and plastered the walls of Paris with a stirring appeal

to the French people. For some months he displayed a remarkable activity in the exhilarating atmosphere of the Revolution. He wrote pamphlets (one entitled *A Dialogue between France, the World, and Robert Owen*), and bombarded the Press with letters. An Irish Owenite, Hugh Doherty, who was at the time lending his Celtic fire to the revolutionists, and a French sympathizer named Goupy took him about and interpreted his documents. As usual in these later years of his life, he attained only one result: he emptied his pockets in the cause of humanity. Within a few weeks the National Workshops failed and were closed, and Owen returned to England.

He was back in London almost before they were closed, and Mr. Podmore reproduces a letter from Lord Brougham to him which illustrates his restlessness in propaganda. Brougham says that he has delivered Owen's letters to Prince Albert and the Queen. A few months later Owen received a curt note from the Prince's secretary reminding him that "the only constitutional method of addressing the Sovereign" was "through the advisers of the Crown." One may safely conjecture that Sir R. Peel had resented Owen's efforts to induce the Queen to do what her ministers neglected. Owen had been a personal friend of the Queen's father, and no doubt he felt that it was not necessary to look up "constitutional methods" when he wished to write to the Duke of Kent's daughter.

He returned to London, to warm his hands at the embers of his movement. The "A1 Branch," in John Street (now Whitfield Street, off Tottenham Court Road), was, somewhat ironically, almost the only branch in England. There was a feeble and obscure second\* at Manchester. The London survivors of the hundred thousand enthusiastic Owenites of a few years before

still met in the large Lecture Hall at John Street, and Owen went at times to address them and receive their veneration. His birthdays were the golden dates in their calendar. He attempted new periodicals, and wrote his *New Existence of Man Upon Earth*. These are long and little-recorded years, but the flickers of light that leap up occasionally from the socket are characteristic. In 1855 Owen called a general meeting to receive the news that the millennium was about to be inaugurated. In 1856 he founded *The Millennial Gazette*, and, what is stranger, he maintained this pathological little paper for two years.

The real pathos of the situation is that Owen, while these deceitful visions of golden ages gladdened his poor sight, never saw the really massive work he had done. The reform movements of both America and England lived largely on the spirit, the social enthusiasm, he had created. Well might Sir Leslie Stephen, as keen a critic as ever lived and no believer in a millennium, declare, in spite of his natural distaste of much that we have chronicled, that Owen "will certainly be recognized as one of the most important figures in the social history of the time." For Stephen saw, though he was no social student in the narrower sense of the word, that Owen "sowed the seed of a harvest which has been reaped by his disciples." He had been the pioneer of factory and general industrial reform. It was advancing steadily. He had been one of the leading pioneers of education, as Lord Brougham reminded London in 1848. That cause also was advancing rapidly. He had demanded equality for women, equity in the distribution of goods, reform in religion, temperance legislation, the discouragement of gambling, the suppression of cruelty to animals, prison reform, and so on. Every cause was advancing. In every agitation were thousands of men and women

in whom he had lit the fire of social idealism: in the Co-operative Movement, in the Secularist world, in the fight against the "taxes on knowledge," in the Trade Unions, in the feminist movement—in every stir and ripple on the once stagnant waters of English life, even in Christian Socialism. I say that the pathos is that he saw not these things, but warmed his slowing blood with gleams of imaginary millennia. The mind was visibly ageing. It lived on its stored impressions. Its avenues from the outer world were tired and dim.

Hence there is no significance whatever in Owen's eventual acceptance of Spiritualism. It was about 1854 that, during one of his visits to America, he was converted to Spiritualism. In 1848 that strange epidemic had started at a small town in New York State, where Mrs. Fox and her daughters announced to the world that the spirits had found a way of communicating through them with the living. A rapping mania spread over America. A plague of mediums fell upon the guileless people of the United States, and prospered. The Fox girls were repeatedly exposed, and at last confessed; but the movement had a good start, and the ingenuity of mediums invented a new method of "communication" as soon as one was exposed. The fever was at its height in America, and had been imported into Europe, when Owen and his son, Robert Dale, succumbed to it. I am not going to dilate on the wonderful messages which Owen received from his mediums. It is enough to say that he was eighty-three years old when he first met the phenomenon, and we have seen how blurred and uncritical his old eyes were. These supposed messages from beyond were mainly responsible for the millennial illusions which brightened his later years.

Let us remember him rather in his strength. His great work had been done under human inspiration. In

later years he began again to use the word "God" occasionally. We find it in 1848. Adin Ballou says that he was then a Pantheist. We have no reason to suppose that this means more than a belief in an impersonal "eternal existence." Throughout the magnificent forty years of his prime, in any case, he was an Agnostic.

In 1853 friends persuaded him to remove from Cox's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, where for some years he had lived on thirty shillings a week, to a farmhouse at Sevenoaks. To the end he took the liveliest interest—nay, an active share—in the movements of the age. Letters and memorials still flowed from his pen. In 1835 he spent £250 (of his £360 a year) in public work. It was friends who secured for him, and insisted on his enjoying, a little of the comfort his four score years had earned. He wanted no rest and no respite. The old message burned in him. The world was not redeemed. The spirits told him that the times were full of promise. In 1857 a National Association for the Promotion of Social Science was inaugurated at Birmingham. Owen wrote five papers for it, one to be read to each section. In October, 1858, though in great pain and conscious that the end drew near, he wrote a long paper, and determined to read it himself at the annual meeting of the Association at Liverpool.

Holyoake affectionately describes the last scene. Feeble and ailing, Owen nevertheless made the miserable railway journey to Liverpool. He was very ill, and they put him to bed; but when the hour of the meeting came near he demanded to be taken to the hall. It took two hours to dress him. In a sedan chair the frail, white figure, the large dark eyes flashing with unearthly fire, was conveyed to the hall. Lord Brougham, against whose many compromises with his sense of human duty we may set his fine loyalty to Owen all his life, saw that

he had his desire. He let him face the audience for a few moments and give out, with quavering voice, a single sentence of his undying and unchanging creed, then hustled him kindly off the platform and to his hotel.

He became unconscious when they put him to bed, but it was not yet the end. A fortnight later he rose from bed and said that he was going to die in his native Newtown. He actually made the journey, and he arrived well enough to venture into the streets. His strength ebbed, however. He refused stimulants, and set about plans for the regeneration of at least Newtown. Public meetings, which he would address, must be called. He even wrote a scheme for the reorganization of education in the town. He believed that he had still a remnant of his lease of life. The local clergyman proposed to come and read the Bible with him. "Mr. Owen turned his head, and said in his commanding way, 'No, no,'" Holyoake tells us. At three o'clock in the afternoon, November 16, he had the rector of the parish brought to him, not to read the Bible, but to discuss his plans for the reorganization of the schools. These were almost his last words. About seven the next morning, November 17, 1858, he fell into his last sleep.

They buried him with such honour as the surviving band of his disciples could give. Since he had wished to be buried near his father, whose grave was in consecrated ground, his friends had to suffer the Church service over his remains. "It pained me deeply," Thomas Allsop said to Holyoake. The rector of the parish even refused to allow any of his friends to speak at the grave. "Better ten Popes officiated at his grave than disturb his funeral by a broil," said Holyoake. He let the Church have its way with the dead frame of him whom it had slandered. He went out into the world to work on at the living monument of Robert Owen. Where is it?

It is the England of our day: the England in which young children no longer enter the brazen jaws of the factory system; in which there are schools for all; in which poverty and vice and drink are at least far paler than they were in 1816; in which a great Co-operative Movement fills millions of the workers with a consciousness of power they had not in Owen's day; in which woman at last stands the civic equal of man; in which jails are no longer foetid hotbeds of crime and vice, and judges no longer the bullies of the poor; in which there are no national lotteries; in which men work eight hours a day instead of fourteen; in which a handful of politicians no longer spurn the will of the people; in which millions now yearn for peace and international co-operation. These were all dreams when Robert Owen entered public life. Who will venture to measure the share he had in transmuting those dreams of his youth into the realities of a happier generation?

It still remains for a later generation to appreciate the real greatness, the magnificent service, of Robert Owen. When W. L. Sargant came, in 1860, only two years after the reformer's death, to publish his *Robert Owen and his Philosophy*, he felt that he had to apologize for writing on so obscure a person. The good that Owen had done, he said, had been interred even before his bones. Sargant, who was entirely unsympathetic, did not do badly for a man of his sentiments, and William Pare enriched his book with much authentic information; but the writer had not a glimpse of Owen's real nobility of character and fine national service. Owen's *Autobiography* (to the year 1820) is as little readable as any of the works he poured out in his later years, and is distorted by his new Spiritualist perspective. Lloyd Jones and Holyoake, two of Owen's followers, wrote with more appreciation, but scantily and inadequately. Reybaud,



and one or two other French and German writers, paid him a fair tribute, for foreigners. By the end of the century he was almost forgotten.

When, in 1908, Sir Leslie Stephen wrote the biographical sketch of him for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he was obviously puzzled. He slights Owen in many ways, yet devotes nine columns to him, and calls him "one of the most important figures in the social history of the time." In conversation Sir Leslie readily admitted to me that he may have been inadequate, and it distressed him to think that he may have failed in justice to any friend of man ; but I had to admit that on the literature available to him he had acted intelligibly. He was no sociologist. Since then we have had the large and exhaustive *Robert Owen* (1906), in two volumes, of Mr. Podmore. I have sufficiently shown in the course of this work that it is inadequate as an appreciation. Podmore lacked enthusiasm for anything at the time he wrote it, and he was too apt to judge Owen from a technical point of view. The few small works on Owen which have followed Podmore's work could not hope to restore the high merit of the great reformer. Apart from the Co-operative Movement, which has at least given grateful care to his tomb, he is almost forgotten. Yet there is hardly a reform movement in England that does not owe to him much of its original spirit, and it is time our happier generation recovered the memory of the greatest social redeemer of the people of England.





